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A POET'S PILGRIMAGE

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A POET'S PILGRIMAGE

by

W. H. DAVIES

AUTHOR OF 'THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A SUPER-TRAMP'

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When dogs play in the sun outdoors,
And cats chase sunbeams on the mat;
When merry maidens laugh for joy,
And young men cock their ears at that;
And babes can see in panes of glass
A better light than firegrate has;

When to my teeth ale is not cold,
And sweeter than hot toast is bread;
When I, no longer charmed by books,
Seek human faces in their stead;
And every stranger that I meet
Will seem a friend whom I must greet;

When I no sooner up at morn,
Must like a turkey bolt my food,
To tramp the white green-bordered roads,
And hear birds sing in many a wood:
When such a time of year has come,
The whole wide world can be my home.

Some time ago, in the month of May, I went by train from London to Carmarthen, with the intention of walking through South Wales, after which I would extend my travels into England.

When I reached Carmarthen it was evening. But on my way from the station into the town

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there was still light enough to see the old castle. I found Carmarthen to be an old-fashioned little town of about ten thousand inhabitants, with those sleepy little streets that always make a place beautiful and interesting.

It was not long before I had arranged for my lodgings, the house being in the main street. At this house I had tea and supper together, owing to the late hour. As I did not want to start drinking in taverns so early in the evening, I made inquiries for the Public Library. But I was told Carmarthen did not possess one, in spite of its ten or twelve thousand inhabitants. However, there was a private Institute which had its members who paid subscriptions, and risking all interference, I entered boldly into the place and began to read the papers. To my surprise no one interfered with me, although they all recognized me as a stranger who had no right to be there. I could tell this by the way in which the members, about fifteen or twenty of them, whispered to each other and cast eyes in my direction. In spite of all I sat reading for a considerable time, as long as I felt a pleasure in doing so.

Leaving the Institute at last I soon entered a tavern, to have my first drink of the evening. There were quite a number of customers pre-

sent, but only one drew my attention, because of his wild behaviour. This was a youth of about seventeen years of age who, I judged, was now taking the first intoxicating drink of his life. He did not seem to be at all dangerous, in spite of the manner in which he threw his body here and there, and the whole company appeared to be amused at him. 'I wish that I could meet my father now,' cried the youth, shaking his head and giving the bar a kick. I gathered that the landlord had refused to serve him with more drink, for two of his friends, one on each side, were trying to lead him to the door. At last they managed to get him there, and the last words I heard as they went into the street were, 'Oh, that I could meet my father now.' No doubt this youth had been chafing for a long time under his father's restraint, and now, thinking he was made a man by a glass of beer, he was eager to speak his mind and claim his future independence. 'I hope the mother's there to protect her son, if her son meets his father now,' thought I.

Thinking of taking a walk before bedtime, I made my way towards the railway station, knowing that I would not lose my way by going in that direction. The street was not very well lighted, not being the main street—and

if people recognized a friend across the road they would do so only by his height, shape and gait. As I was walking along I suddenly heard a loud cheerful voice exclaim, 'Good evening, Will.' When I heard this I turned my head, naturally, my name being Will—forgetting I was not known in the town of Carmarthen. When I had done so I saw a man across the road who was looking my way, and who, when he saw my face turned towards him, cried out again, 'Good evening, Will.' However, I now began to realize that it was a case of mistaken identity, so I passed on without an answer. But I had hardly gone ten yards when another voice called across the road, 'Good evening, Will.'

'Good evening,' I called back, not liking to pass this second man without an answer. I had not gone far after this when I was greeted for the third time by another cheerful voice, 'Good evening, Will.'

I answered this man's greeting in the same cheerful way, for the sake of the man I was mistaken for. The other Will must have been well liked, respected and popular; and I considered it my duty, for his sake, to acknowledge the kind greetings in the same manner as he would have done. I not only must have been very much like him in height and shape,

but must also have had the same peculiar walk. Before I got back to my lodgings four men had greeted me in the distance with the words, 'Good evening, Will.' The first man was the only one I did not answer, for I not only returned good evening to the other three – I even waved my hand to them. These Welsh greetings were so cheerful and kind, and so hearty, that after having had several glasses of ale, I said to myself before I got into bed that night, 'Good evening, Will' – thinking I was the idol of that pleasant town of Carmarthen, and flattering myself into a pleasant sleep. I had persuaded myself that I was back in my native town and was loved and respected by everyone.

As the clock struck nine on the following morning, I was leaving Carmarthen, full of joy at the thought of going on and on, the uncertainty of where I would get my next meal, what kind of people I would meet, and where I would sleep that night. Being in this fine mood, I spoke to a little boy, whom I saw playing alone in the road, asking him what he was going to be when he grew up. Of course, I expected to hear him say a sailor, a soldier, a hunter or something else that seems heroic to childhood, and I was very much surprised when he answered innocently, 'A man.' However, I did not question him any more, but gave him a penny and passed on.

I was now without doubt a free man, and did not care whose company I had, whether it was a grumbling farmer or the lazy beggar that had left fleas in the farmer's barn.

When I got about a mile clear of the town, I made inquiries for about the third time, so as to make sure I was on the right road to Kidwelly. 'It is eleven miles to Kidwelly,' said the man I inquired of, who was wheeling a

bicycle, and whose clothes were shabby and patched. However, the next moment he, seeing me walk with a limp, very considerately reduced the distance, saying, 'It is about nine miles from Carmarthen to Kidwelly.'

'Are there any villages on the way?' I asked.

'None of any consequence,' he answered.

'The reason I ask,' I said, 'is that I don't want to go hungry or thirsty on my way. If there are any inns, I can do well enough until I get to Kidwelly. Do you mind telling me if I pass any inns?'

'Yes, indeed you do,' answered the shabby-looking stranger; 'but if you will take my advice you will keep out of places of that kind. I have not been inside one for thirteen years. If I had, I would not be the owner of this.'

With these words he pointed to his bicycle, which he at once mounted and rode off. When I was left alone I could not help laughing at the stranger's words, for the bicycle was old and rickety, and was not worth thirteen shillings. If that man, who was so ill-dressed, had nothing more than an old, rickety bicycle to show for thirteen years' total abstinence, it was not much to be proud of. The machine was worth, as I have said, about thirteen shillings, and he had been an abstainer for thirteen years.

According to that he had saved a shilling a year, being one penny a month and a farthing a week.

Not long after this I went into a wayside inn and had a pint of ale, where I again inquired if I was on the right road to Kidwelly. On being told yes, I left and continued my journey. But that pint of ale plunged me into such a deep reverie, that it must have been nearly an hour before I came out of it. When I did so, I found that I was in front of another inn, which I entered, and again inquired if I was on the right road to Kidwelly.

'No, indeed you are not,' answered the landlord's daughter; 'you are now going to Llanelly.'

'What's the name of this village?' I asked.

'This is Minke,' she answered. The Welsh pronounce it Minker. When I heard this I knew that I had gone wrong, for I had been told in Carmarthen that I must not go through Minke. However, although Llanelly was fifteen miles from Carmarthen, and it was up and down steep hills all the way, I made up my mind to reach it before six o'clock. I had intended to have made two days of my journey to Llanelly, Kidwelly being one day's walk and Llanelly the next. I was now making one journey of it, under wretched conditions, for it was drizzling

rain, and I could not get my feet to grip the slippery road.

I could not help noticing the fine green banks at the side of the road, on top of which the hedgerows were allowed to grow wild. What surprised me was the number and variety of flowers that were to be seen. All my old favourites were there in abundance: daisies and buttercups, primroses, violets, bluebells, ground ivy, herb Robert, speedwell, milkwort, dandelion and strawberry blossom. There were also a number of other beautiful wild flowers, which I knew by sight, but whose names I could not remember.

When I got to Pontyates, about half-way between Carmarthen and Llanelly, I saw a well-known name on the signboard of an inn, and made up my mind to patronize that house at once. So I entered and, going into the tap-room, gave the landlady my order for a small portion of bread and cheese and a glass of ale. She thanked me and, when leaving the room, very considerately closed the door, so that I could not be seen by any others that came in. In a few moments Mrs. E —— brought me the usual amount of bread and cheese, for which innkeepers charge twopence, and a glass of ale, which costs three halfpence – threepence half-

penny altogether. But I was not very hungry, and had only eaten two or three small mouthfuls when I felt surfeited. So I finished the ale, and finding Mrs. E—— inquired the amount I owed her. When I heard her answer, I was amazed at her impudence. 'Sevenpence halfpenny,' she said, looking me boldly in the face. I gave her a shilling without a murmur, wishto God that I was dealing with William her husband.

I had never experienced such a bare-faced imposition in my whole life. It was so ridiculously in excess of the usual charge, that I grieve every time I think of it, in spite of my indifference to money. This woman thought I was a rich man, which surprised me. For not long before this a tramp to whom I had given a penny – he had not begged of me – asked in a kind, considerate voice, 'Are you sure you can spare it?' However, perhaps Mrs. E—— thought I was drunk, and did not know what I was doing.

I left this inn at an unfortunate time, for on looking down the road I saw about thirty children playing outside a building which I knew must be a school. There were also a number of other children in twos, threes and fours, coming up the road. I did not know how

they would receive me, for in out-of-the-way places children often pelt strangers with stones. But when I got in the midst of them they only looked with a mild curiosity, and the oldest among them greeted me respectfully, saying, 'Good afternoon.'

What struck me was, that although they were talking among themselves in Welsh, yet, for all that, they addressed me in English. I asked one of the boys if he always spoke Welsh when he was out of school and he answered, 'Yes.' 'But,' I questioned, 'your school lessons are in English, are they not?' 'Yes,' he answered.

Having reached Llanelly I went into an inn to have a drink and a rest before I went in search of lodgings. It was a quiet old-fashioned inn, for I was not yet in the business part of the town. When I entered I found it occupied by two very old men, with white beards, who were laughing like two little children. They had had a drop too much to drink, and were now standing up with their arms round each other's necks, and without the least reserve were saying how much they loved each other.

'Jim boy,' cried one of them, looking lovingly into his companion's face, – 'Jim boy, I have known you now for forty years, and I have loved you ever since the first day.'

'Tom boy,' answered the other with the same fond look,—'Tom boy, I have always loved you the same. We have had many a drink together, Tom boy, and I hope, indeed, we will have many more.'

'Nothing will stop us, Jim boy; nothing whatever,' answered the other, 'for I have never met a man that I loved better. No, indeed.'

'I was somewhat confused at hearing two men speak in such a manner, and was very glad that they were too much occupied with each other to take notice of a stranger.

I slept well after my fifteen miles of up and down hill from Carmarthen to Llanelly.

OLD SAILORS

I loved a ship from early boyhood days;
It seemed to me a thing that lived and felt,
To pet and coax, that knew the captain's voice.
I heard the captain shouting to his men,
And, as that voice which calleth home the cows,
Will make the far off sheep look up and bleat,
So in my heart that captain's voice found ears,
Meant for his men. Oh, what a joy was mine
To see in dock the little boat that sailed
Across the deep Atlantic with one man!
I saw the two old warships made of oak,
That in days gone had spake out fierce and loud
With iron tongues in bodies of hard wood.
I saw the steamship that could go its way
Without consulting any wind or tide;
That ship of steam, and its propeller with
Four mighty arms of iron that could churn
The sea for miles when it lay calm and blue.
I watched the sailors, every move they made;
Those sailors true, whose eyes would grow more
bright,
Like glow-worms, when they saw a coming storm.
This world on which we live is but a ship
Without a port on an eternal cruise;
Oft taking fire, it burns its living crew,
Then sailing into a cold void, its hull,
Encased in ice, takes a warm current back,
And a new crew is born for æons more.

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The next morning on inquiring, I learnt that Swansea was only thirteen miles from Llanelly —a comfortable day's walk. So, after having had an early breakfast, I started on this walk, but found to my annoyance that for six miles out of Llanelly there were houses all the way. When I was about six miles from Llanelly I crossed the river Lougher, into the town of that name. From the bridge I could see miles of beautiful yellow sands, but there was not much sign of any human life. After having had a drink at the first inn I came to, I continued my way towards Swansea. But I had scarcely gone a quarter of a mile, when a man overtook me, and said in a friendly voice, 'You have got as far as this, then?'

Turning my head, I saw at my side a working man, who was dressed in his best clothes. In the course of conversation he told me that he had been to Llanelly, in which town he had seen me, but had lost his train back; and that he had to change his clothes so as to begin work at two o'clock. At that time it was about twelve, and seeing we were in front of an inn, and that he had told me that his home was only half a mile away, I at once invited him to have a drink. He readily agreed to this proposal, and we entered the inn, which was called

the *Globe*. This was the first friendly voice that had greeted me for some time, and I was determined to get something out of this man, especially as he told me, almost at once, that he was not a Welshman, having been born in Staffordshire. 'What a poverty-stricken place this is!' I exclaimed. 'I have now walked six miles from Llanelly with houses all the way, and have not seen one house with a rent that could be more than ten shillings a week. Where do the people live that earn three or four hundred a year?'

'When I asked this question I was thinking of the fine villas near London, where people live in comfort and style on three or four hundred a year. However, I saw that I had made a mistake in the way I put my question, and corrected myself at once. For this man received weekly wages and did not understand money by the year. So I said almost immediately, 'Where do the better classes live, who earn about six or seven pounds a week?'

'Why,' answered my companion, who worked in the tin-plate trade,—'why, they live all around you. John Thomas, who lives a few doors from here, has a very nice house, as I will show you. He makes seven pounds a week, and his rent is six shillings. I myself, look you, earn between five and six pounds a week; and

I pay five shillings and sixpence a week for my house.'

'Some of you earn a lot of money,' I said. 'Now, tell me, how is it that when you go on strike, and are out of work for a month, you are penniless, and live on the subscriptions of the large Welsh towns?'

But I could get no satisfaction to this question, and his only answer was, 'The money goes somehow.'

In fact, this man told me that six and even eight pounds wages went every week into some of the little cottages I had passed, the rents of which were only five or six shillings a week, and clear of all rates and taxes. I was very much surprised at hearing this, for I knew that there were thousands of men near London who dressed well and kept a large house with a couple of servants on eight pounds a week. But these common tin-plate workers in Wales had no servants, and only had a second suit of clothes – where did their money go to? With a wife that knew nothing about fashion, two or three children that received a common school-board education, and little rent to pay, this rich working man would yet be penniless and starving after being out of work for little more than a month.

After we had had one drink at my expense, my companion insisted on paying for another. However, in spite of his boast of earning between five and six pounds a week, I was determined to be the richer man. So I paid for another and we then left the inn, for he had to change his clothes and start work at two o'clock.

In about ten minutes after we had left the inn, my companion came to a halt in front of two small cottages at the side of the road, and pointing to them said, 'Look you now, these cottages look small, but you would be surprised to see how large they are inside.'

'Yes,' I answered, thinking of the large wages some of these men earned,—'yes, and no doubt they contain some fine furniture.'

'Aye, indeed they do,' he answered eagerly.

The next moment he shook me by the hand, and to my surprise went into one of the cottages. I could now see that my companion had been praising his own mean-looking little house.

As I went along I began to think of the mistake I had made. It appeared that quite a number of working men in Wales had an income of two hundred a year, and when I had asked where the better classes lived I should have mentioned men with £800 or £1,000 a year.

After I had considered a while I began to account for the high pay and poverty in Wales. For instance, this man lived principally on solid meat – no good for his pocket or his health – for he mentioned how he could eat steaks and chops in spite of having no teeth. Again, he drank three pints to my three glasses, and appeared to be impatient of the restraint, although ashamed to call for more. Again, the Welsh ale was not very strong, and an ordinary man could drink it all day and still be little the worse for it at night.

This man had also mentioned that he had three pictures in the house that had cost him fifteen pounds. Knowing something about pictures – for I had framed many a print for Jew hawkers to take into the Welsh hills – I came to the conclusion that his pictures were not worth thirty shillings. The same man also advised me when I complained of my long walk from Carmarthen to Llanelly, without a chance to ride, to hail a motor-car if the driver was without his master, and give him a couple of shillings for a ride. He said that he had often done this when walking to Llanelly, which was still a mile or more away. No wonder these common workers in Wales, who pay so little rent and nothing to educate their children can-

not save anything out of two or three hundred pounds a year.

It had not been a very pleasant walk from Lanelly to Swansea, because of the houses all the way, with no pretty little cottages with trees in front of them. So I was not sorry when I reached my journey's end and was done with the road for that particular day. As soon as I had paid for my bed at a restaurant kept by one Daniel Evans, I went out for a walk, making my way towards the ships. It was not long before I entered a quiet inn, where I saw three men, who, it was quite clear, were sailors of the old school. Two of them were seated, but the other was standing at the bar and talking in a loud free voice. This man, who was shaped roundly like a barrel, was dressed in a blue knitted jersey, and had a pair of very wide, dark pilot-cloth trousers. His face was very large and red, covered with a curly, brown beard, and his neck was thick and stout. He was one of those men with big, long bodies which make them look giants when seated, but who stand no taller than ordinary men. His legs were not only short, but bowed as well, and in that way lost their real length. In fact, he looked very much shorter than he really was, owing to his shape.

His two companions, who were quietly listening to him, were dressed in the same way, but were younger and of usual proportions, without any unusual feature.

When I gave the landlord my order, the speaker, who had his back turned, faced around and nodded familiarly. After doing this, he continued to address his companions, who were quietly smoking their pipes. No doubt the old sailor was on his pet subject, for he did not appear to be at any loss for ideas or words. The subject was sailing ships and steamships, and the kind of men that man them. The old sailor was now speaking in great scorn of engineers, firemen and stokers, and wanted to know how such men could call themselves mariners, seeing that their life was below deck.

'Have they ever been in the shrouds or rigging? Damn my breeches, no,' cried the old fellow. 'Have they ever shouted "Light on the port or starboard side," or "All's well," or "Land ahead"? Have they ever been on deck in a hurricane? Damn them, no. They're always below deck, shovelling coal into furnaces. Damn my guts. Are these our sailors nowadays? The only time they come on deck is when they are passing from the stokehole to the forecastle. Look at their faces — the white-livered sharks.'

The old sailor poured forth his scorn without end, saying that such pale sickly men were what were called mariners nowadays, who went to sea and saw no water. Other ships were passed, icebergs, islands and whales, but these men never saw them. The salt winds could blow while these so-called mariners were down in a stokehole breathing nothing but hot smoke. The spray could be tumbling on the deck while these so-called mariners were wiping the sweat off their brows. They never wore sea-boots, and when they came on deck had to be as careful as cats not to wet their feet.

When the old man's companions heard this they gave a hoarse guffaw, in which he joined with great heartiness.

After a while he continued, saying, 'Damn my skin, if these white-faced mariners don't take a spell when their furnace work is done, because their blood must cool before the winds touch their bodies. If they didn't do that they would catch cold and cough, etc., perhaps die — poor dears!' When the old sailor said this there was another hoarse laugh from his companions, in which he again joined as hearty as ever.

I was not at all surprised to hear these ideas, for I had heard them often from my grand-

father, who was an old mariner of the same kind. He would never admit that engineers, firemen and stokers were sailors, although they went to sea and called themselves by that proud name. He always said that the wind and not fire was the care of the true mariner. He had no interest in anything except the weather, and his chief conversation was the doings of the wind. My grandfather's opinion of man, woman or child that came into the house and could not answer as to which way the wind blew, was not very high.

He did not need the information, but he was never satisfied if others did not show the same interest. If they did not, he judged them to be of small account and took no trouble to entertain them. Any kind of answer would do, for the old man would then speak according to a compass. If he got up early in the morning — which he nearly always did — he never sat down to breakfast until he had told us all, which way the wind blew, although I cannot remember seeing my grandmother show the least concern. When night came no one could go out of the house for even a minute and come back in, back door or front, without being asked, 'Is everything made fast?' If the maidservant went out to the back with rubbish, she was always

asked on her return if she had made everything fast. No sooner would my grandfather see us all preparing for bed, than he would stand in the middle of the kitchen—a big, red-faced, bearded old man—and roar, at no one in particular, 'Is everything made fast?' The maidservant would always answer for the back door, saying, 'I have bolted the back door, Captain Davies.' But in spite of these words my grandfather was always the last to go to bed, and he was to be heard trying all the locks, bolts and latches for some time after we had all gone upstairs.

Other people locked their doors and fastened their windows at night for one reason only—to keep out thieves. But that old sea captain knew the power of a strong wind, and feared no other housebreaker at night. One morning my grandmother said she had heard in the night someone fingering at the front door, and the maidservant had heard also. But when my grandfather was told of this he wanted to know what else it could be but the wind. On this occasion he loudly expressed his disgust at being 'surrounded by a parcel of women that could not tell the difference between the wind and a thief.'

My own wandering blood comes from my

seafaring grandfather, who, after he had left the sea and settled on shore, still governed his house by a ship's rules. I was quite young at the time of his death, but I remember it well. I had been left in the room to watch him, with orders, which I did not understand, to call for help if anything happened. A small fire was burning in the grate—a proof that the old sea captain was far gone, or he would not have had a coal fire in a bedroom. This fire made the room look cheerful, and I never had one thought of death. Moreover, I had a very interesting book of wild adventure, which I was about half-way through, and eager to continue to the end. Being deeply interested in this book I could not say whether my grandfather called once or twice; all I know is that I was suddenly made aware of his voice, and remembered that I had to call for help if anything happened. Taking the book with me I went to his bedside and leaned over him. His face, which had always been so red, was now quite pale.

He looked hard at me for a long time, but said nothing. I was just about to return to my seat at the fire, when he began to mutter indistinctly. But, in spite of his difficulty, his last word was quite clear—it was the word 'fast.' Of course, I knew at once that he was then

asking if everything was made fast, so I nodded 'Yes.' Seeing him now looking satisfied I lost no time in returning to my book. But I could not have been reading very long when I heard a struggle in the bed. This sound made me tremble with fear, for I thought my grandfather had gone mad and was about to rise and attack me. Waiting for a little time, to see if he succeeded in rising, when I intended to run out of the room, I felt a great relief to see him at last lying quiet again, and to hear him breathing hard. But soon after this I became more frightened than ever, for he was now taking very long breaths, which I did not know the meaning of. At last these breaths became so very long that I felt it impossible to remain in the room, for I expected something to happen, although his hands and feet made no motion at all. However, I sat still for a while longer, but had now forgotten all about my book. While my mind was in this state, not knowing whether to stay or go, I heard a sound—I had never heard its like before—coming from my grandfather's bed; a sound that frightened me more than heavy breathing—it was a rattle in the old man's throat. In less than half a minute after hearing this I was down in the presence of my grandmother and her comforters. As soon

as they saw my face they all knew that something had happened.

But to go back to my pilgrimage. The old sailor at Swansea was still talking in a loud voice, to the delight of his companions and myself, when another voice, clearer than his, but not so strong, interrupted him suddenly with these words: 'England — bloody good country! Englishman — bloody good man!'

Turning my head in the direction of that voice, I saw to my surprise the tall figure of an Indian coolie, who had opened the door and now stood half in and half out. I then looked at the old sailor, to see the effect of this strange figure and the words it had uttered. When I did so, I never saw so much scorn in a human face before.

'What's that you're saying?' roared the old man, turning on the intruder.

'England — bloody good country! Englishman — bloody good man!' cried the coolie, stepping into the room and showing his white teeth.

'Of course it's a b——— good country and Englishmen are b——— good men,' snapped the old sailor, nodding his head vigorously.

'Yah, yah, me know it,' said the coolie, stepping forward and patting the old sailor on the

back. 'Yah, yah! England—' and again he repeated his extraordinary phrase. After saying this for the third time he stepped back and raising his arm slowly towards heaven, as if to attest before God the truth of his statement, he cried for the fourth time: 'England – bloody good country! Englishman – bloody good man!'

By this time the old sailor was looking puzzled, and I was beginning to wonder how it would all end. The landlord was standing attentively behind the bar, waiting for the coolie's order.

'Here,' cried the old sailor, impulsively, 'drink.' Saying this he held out his pint of beer, which he had scarcely touched. The tall, lean coolie took the beer with a rapid movement, and did not return the mug until it was quite empty. After doing this, he stepped back into the middle of the room and, raising his arm again, cried in a loud voice of triumph, 'England – bloody good country! Englishman – bloody good man!'

The next instant he was gone, going as silently as he came, for he was in his bare feet.

As soon as the coolie had gone, the old sailor looked at his companions, and then at the landlord, in a rather shamefaced manner, for he could now see that he had been tricked.

'Yes,' said the landlord, bitterly, 'England is certainly a good country and Englishmen are good men, when such things as that can come into an inn and get drink for nothing.'

'But,' roared the old sailor, 'I thought he came in to buy a drink, and I only offered him a mouthful of beer, to show there was no ill will. England is a damn rotten country, and Englishmen are damn fools, when a dirty foreigner like that can get what he wants so easily. If he comes back here again I'll wring his b—— neck, the yellow swine!'

I was just on the point of saying something to this old sailor, but left it too late, for all at once one of his companions mentioned a place they had to go to. So they finished their beer and left, wishing me a good day as they went out. However, even if they had not gone so soon, it is hardly likely, on second thoughts, that I would have opened my mouth at all. For instance, to get into their good graces, it would have been wise to show a generous nature by placing money on the bar and inviting them to drink. I would have been pleased to have done that, but was afraid of what would follow. For these sailors are so independent and good-natured that they would have insisted on paying for more drinks in return,

which I did not want just then, as their company would have been hard to leave. If they had been on the rocks, without money to spend, the case would have been different.

This old sailor at Swansea was not only like my grandfather in looks — except that my grandfather was longer in the legs—but also had exactly the same ideas. He mentioned several vessels by name, such as the *Mary Jane* of Bideford, and the *Polly Ann* of Penzance, but none of the grand names that are given to ships of iron and steam. The old sailor was a man of Devon, I believe.

I INTENDED on the following day to walk to Neath, but when the morning came I decided to stay in Swansea for another day so as to have a thorough clean up. I had not had a bath for several days, neither had I troubled about clean boots. However, although I had no journey to make, I still got up at my usual time, which was about eight o'clock, and was downstairs for breakfast before the half-hour had struck. Seeing the landlady's young daughter, I ordered two fried eggs, some bread and a small pot of tea. I was travelling without baggage of any kind, and even if I had had the money I could not apply for accommodation at superior places. This house, where I was now staying, catered for the very poor, for they sold faggots and green peas at twopence a plate, and a small cup of tea at a halfpenny. So I judged that my breakfast would be sixpence or sevenpence at the most. When it came I did not trouble to inquire the charge, but gave a shilling, expecting change. But the girl looked at the shilling and then looked at me in a way I did not understand. Then going to a china cup that was behind the counter she dropped the shilling into

it, and then went to her mother who was sitting behind a screen and began whispering to her.

At this I began to think of Mrs. E——, and could not help thinking that Mrs. Evans was her sister in cheating a stranger. I had seen pots of fresh tea advertised in the windows at superior-looking restaurants at twopence, two fried eggs would not be more than fourpence, and two thin slices of bread without butter would not be more than a penny—sevenpence in all and very profitable to the landlady. So, when I did not receive my change in ten minutes' time, I said to the girl, who had passed me several times, casting suspicious glances, 'You have forgotten my change.' Without saying a word she returned to her mother, and there was another whispered consultation. The next moment Mrs. Evans snapped in a loud voice, 'Change,' and sprang to her feet. Coming from behind the screen she went to another china cup and, taking out the change, brought it forward and laid it on the table, at the side of my plate. When I looked, feeling sorry that I had said anything at all, I was stupefied, for my change was only one halfpenny. Mrs. Evans knew that I was entitled to change, but was determined to make it as small as possible.

After having had breakfast, I again made my way towards the docks, which I found to be reasonably full of all kinds of craft. I was surprised to see several fine large wooden barques, and came to the conclusion that wooden vessels still had a long time to live, in spite of the much greater number of steamships.

When I was returning from the docks I saw two little girls looking into a confectioner's shop. So I stopped at once and gave them a penny, telling them to go inside and buy some sweets.

'Our mother is going to take us to the Mumbles soon,' said one of the little girls, looking up into my face with wide-open eyes.

The Mumbles were the seaside sands about five miles from Swansea, which I had been to years before, when I was young.

'What lucky little girls you are,' I exclaimed. 'When you get there please give the lobsters my love and tell them I couldn't come.'

'If we see any we will, yes, indeed we will,' said the same little girl, looking at me seriously.

I like to make game of little children in this way, but sometimes they ask questions that make me suspect them of having the same design on me.

For instance, one morning some years ago,

I saw a little fellow standing outside a shop, looking very disappointed indeed. Knowing me, this little fellow came forward immediately, and began to relate his trouble. 'I have been into this shop to buy some fireworks,' he said, 'but the man won't serve me because I am not old enough. Will you buy some for me? *Are you over thirteen?'* As a man of forty, who had no objection to being told he looked younger by years, I looked hard at that little boy, but could see no sign of mischief in his clear eyes.

I was surprised and shocked to see the number of wretched-looking men, women and children in Swansea. For I soon saw another little mite staring into a cake shop. I touched him lightly on the shoulder, and when he turned his head held a penny out to him. But this ragged little fellow no sooner had the penny in his hand than he ran off like a thief, without saying a word or giving me a second look. No doubt he had often stared into shop windows, and no man or woman had ever given him anything for his trouble. So when such a thing did happen, he thought there was something wrong; that I was a poor simple, half-witted idiot that gave my money away for nothing, to anybody, not knowing what I was doing; and that if he did not get away at once I would

grow wise and repent and demand my money back. This poor little mite was very dirty and ragged, with no boots or stockings on his feet; no cap, no coat and no waistcoat; only a torn shirt and a pair of torn breeches.

I like to give pennies to children, but unfortunately a man cannot do these things if he lives in a small village or town where his face is known and seen every day. For children take advantage, as I know to my cost, and would gather round him like hens around a farmer when he scatters grain. Moreover, if you buy a child's goodwill with money, it takes money to keep it. I have found children and birds to be alike in this: it is no wiser to give money to one than it is to give crumbs to the other. Children are best left in the hands of their parents, and birds to the care of nature, for they both quarrel over a stranger's bounty. One morning I saw a robin with only half a head — just enough head to hold one eye. This was owing to deadly strife with other birds, because he would not seek fresh quarters, and still remained for my crumbs. But, as I have said, it is different in a large town or city where a man meets strange children that do not know his house or haunts, and never saw him before and may never see him again.

My walk from Llanelly to Swansea, a distance of twelve miles, had taught me this — that where there were no people of wealth and culture, there was no beauty. For twelve miles I had on both sides of me mean, dirty-looking houses, without one garden of sufficient beauty to make me give a second glance. And yet I had seen quite a number of fine sites on the hills where a beautiful house could have been built and several acres of green made into a pleasant garden. But no people of wealth and culture had had the courage to do so, owing, I suppose, to the mean little modern houses that stretched in every direction. Things are arranged differently in English towns, where the rich and poor live side by side without spoiling the beauty of their surroundings.

On inquiring for the public baths, I heard that they were at St. Helens, which I could reach by a tram ride that would cost three-halfpence. This was a fine ride all the way, with beautiful houses and shops of a superior class. In fact, the road looked so rich, comfortable and pleasant, that I made up my mind to walk back, especially as I had caught sight of the gates of a green park.

I had another idea in walking back, instead of riding, which no doubt will apppear a very

foolish one. I had seen a certain house, not marked by any peculiarity at all, except that it was between two shops, and I was curious to know who lived there, for I had noticed that both of the shop keepers were named Evans, and I began to think that was the most popular name in Swansea, seeing that I had noticed it so many times.

When I had got back to the two shops I took up a position on the other side of the street and questioned the passers-by as to who lived in the private house over the way. For a long time I could not get any satisfaction, as no one seemed to know or care. So I went into another shop close by, and there I was told, to my delight, that the man who lived in the private house was a Mr. Evans. I felt a great satisfaction in hearing this, for I would have been quite disappointed if any other name had been mentioned. Here was a private Evans, living between two public Evanses, and I had been right in my surmise. I was so pleased with myself at making this discovery, that I gave twopence, without being solicited, to the first poor-looking man I came to. I even went back to Mrs. Evans, in spite of the way she had overcharged me, and told her that I would keep my room for another night.

What, still another woman false,
Another honest man betrayed:
Then Heaven is made for only men,
And Hell for women made.

Now, with that false deceitful sex,
Henceforth I have for ever done;
Only one Judas lived a man,
But every woman's one.

Send down, O Lord, ten thousand Christs,
Each one as great as Christ Thy Son;
Not for all men, but just to make
One woman true, just one.

On the following morning, it being Saturday, I started for Neath, which was nine miles distant. I had four miles of the same little wretched houses and hovels, until I had passed through Llansamlet. When passing through this industrial village, I often had my attention drawn to the children, and was surprised at their dirty appearance. Of course, I made allowance for the conditions, seeing that there were numerous smoking stacks, and came to the conclusion that it would be impossible to keep children clean for a whole day in a place of that kind. However, I caught sight of several

children looking through the windows and, seeing that it was half-past ten o'clock, I knew that the dirt on their faces belonged to the day before, and that their mothers had not yet washed them. It was quite apparent that the children were neglected. In fact, the squalor of these industrial villages, where men earned good money, compared very unfavourably with the agricultural villages where low wages and cleanliness went together.

A few moments after I had passed through Llansamlet I met a man coming towards me, whom I judged to be out of work and a stranger in that part of the country.

'Are you out of work?' I asked, somewhat timidly, for he did not look like a man to be patronized.

'Yes,' he answered, 'I am.'

'How long have you been out of a job?' I inquired.

'Two days,' he answered.

'Slackness of trade?' I ventured.

'No, there was plenty of work, and I left of my own accord,' answered the stranger.

'I suppose you had a few drinks and a lazy fit came on you,' I said.

'No, I didn't drink at all,' answered the stranger. 'I have worked hard all my life and

like work, and am quite satisfied with no more than rest on Saturday afternoons and Sundays, and the usual holidays.

I did not know what to make of this, but dared not ask him any more questions. Here was a young man, healthy and strong, who had work and liked it, but would not do it, who did not drink – here was this young man found on the road hungry and penniless, it seemed. I was very curious over this matter, but as long as he liked to hold his tongue I could not very well question him any more. However, I thought perhaps a little help in the shape of money would win his confidence. With this thought I put my hand into my pocket and took out twopence, all the coppers I had, and gave them to him.

'Thank you,' he said, 'you are very kind. I don't know what will become of me in the end. Most likely I shall die of hunger, for I have no heart to work, after what has happened to me. I have been disappointed in a woman, and that is why I am here now, wishing I was struck by lightning or drowned in a flood.'

Saying this, he began to stare up the road, as though he had forgotten all about my being present. After he had stood for a moment or two in this way, he turned his face again and

said, 'If I had remained in Cardiff any longer I would have killed the both of them. As it is, I feel strongly tempted to go back and do it.'

'Whatever they have done,' I advised, knowing nothing of his affairs,— 'whatever they have done, take my advice and don't get into trouble on their account. Did they serve you very badly, then?'

'They did,' he answered bitterly.

In a few moments after this I had the whole tale from him, which related to a woman's heartlessness of a most cruel kind. He had been courting a woman for over two years, during which time he had been a strict teetotaller, in steady work, and had saved over £50. Thinking this amount was quite enough to make a comfortable home for the wife of a working man, he gave her the money to get things ready, so that they could get married as soon as possible. But this woman had, during the last month, met another man she liked better, an old sweetheart of hers who had no money to get married with, and was never likely to have any. The truth of the matter was that he was a common loafer, a public-house crawler and a beggar of beer. However, this man was the woman's real hero, and now came her chance to marry him. She knew that her man

was unfortunate, had no money and no immediate prospects of making any. Knowing this, she made up her mind to make a home for *him,* seeing that he was not capable of making one for her. With this idea she went to him at once with the money and they got married. When my new acquaintance found out that he was not only jilted but that a false woman had made him pay for a lazy worthless man to take his place in marriage, he was almost distracted. All his future was darkened, and feeling that he would be tempted to kill both of them outright he left the town as soon as possible.

I was so sorry for this poor fellow that, though I am far from being a rich man, I could not find it in my heart to offer him less than a shilling.

However, although he took it, it seemed to be with the utmost indifference. This made me think that his grief had had such an effect on him that he did not value his life at all, and for that reason was quite indifferent to the things that maintained it. For, while he was in this troubled state, he would not be able to feel hunger acutely; and, as he would not be able to sleep well, he had no particular care to lie in a comfortable bed.

After advising him to harden his heart, and

settle in some strange town where he would not be likely to meet anyone to remind him of the past, I left him and continued my journey towards Neath.

As soon as I got within a mile of Neath I began to be struck by the unusual beauty of my new surroundings. I had passed several fine houses and pretty cottages, and saw that the owners of them took a pride in the beauty of their homes. On my left there was a fine old church and cemetery, and, looking to my right, I saw before me the leafy ruins of Neath Abbey. But the approach to the abbey ruins from where I then stood was spoilt, owing to a railway being there and dirty coal cars standing between us. However, I was told soon after that the approach from the other side was as pleasant as it should be. I had seen enough beauty to like Neath before I entered the town at all.

I had an old friend at Neath, in business for himself, whom I had not seen for years and whom I sought without delay. As soon as I found him I received a cordial welcome not only from him and his wife but also their friends that came to see me. It was a proof of Welsh good-nature; so long as I had a friend that knew and could introduce me, the whole Welsh people would do anything to entertain,

and would even neglect their business to do so. But as a stranger in Wales, it is difficult to break through their suspicion and mistrust.

The following morning, being Sunday, I went out walking with my old friend and two others, so that they might show me the surrounding country. They took me up an avenue of trees, quiet and a real lovers' walk. After walking for about half an hour it was time to turn back, but before doing so we stepped on to a high bank, from where we could see the green Welsh mountains stretching for miles. One mountain in particular drew my attention, and I inquired its name. 'That is Drymma,' answered one of my friends, who had been speaking to me of it the previous night. He had then told me of how he had spent a summer's day on that mountain, and had remarked to one of its inhabitants, a woman, that it must be very healthy to live up there. 'Yes,' answered the woman, 'doctors often come up here, but it's only for confinements.'

The same evening we had a certain social gathering which is quite common in Wales. Several friends who are fond of song meet together and sing to their hearts' content until a late hour. So full of song were these friends of mine that it was one o'clock before we parted,

although they were all business men and had to rise early the next morning. Their enthusiasm for song was pure and simple, and needed no help from stimulants. If anything, their last notes were as full-hearted as their first, and their minds were so full of sweet music when we parted that I imagined that they would beat time with their hands and feet when they slept. They all had good voices and the hostess, who accompanied them on the piano, had won her certificate of R.A.M., which was framed on the wall above her head.

The following morning I took another fine walk to the hill called Cimla, from which I could command other extensive views of Neath in the valley, and the green hills beyond. In fact, wherever I went I could not help being struck with the beauty all around.

During my stay in Neath I heard very little Welsh spoken, and saw very little to remind me of the Welsh people. For instance, people did not openly stare at me, although they must have recognized me as a stranger, and it was like being in an English town. My most painful experience had been in a small industrial village between Llanelly and Swansea. I had gone into a shop to buy tobacco, and on coming out saw that a funeral procession was about to pass.

There happened to be about twenty men standing at a corner, who I naturally thought would have their attention drawn to the funeral and take no particular notice of a stranger. So I stood there bareheaded out of respect to the dead and waited for the funeral to pass. But these men, instead of looking at the funeral, stared at me with such open curiosity that I almost dropped with confusion. This was a most trying experience, for instead of looking pale, as the mourners would expect me to look, I turned very red and, being conscious of this, wished that I had gone my way instead of showing any concern at all for a Welsh corpse.

After I had told my friend at Neath what I was doing – taking a walking tour through England and Wales, and that I had found my fellow-countrymen inclined to be suspicious, he, being an English-speaking Welshman from Monmouthshire, quite believed me and began to tell me his own experience since he had become his own master. He had been a journeyman for a number of years, until he had saved enough money to begin business for himself, and had settled to it in the little town of Neath. But, he explained, he could never do any clean, fair and open business with real Welsh people, unless prepared to use their own language; who,

as soon as they are forced to speak English, become suspicious and think they are being robbed. He related for instance, when he first settled down as his own master, he could not understand why, when he told a Welshman or his wife that a certain article would cost four shillings, he or she would haggle worse than a Jew to have the price reduced to two shillings and sixpence. So he consulted some of his fellow-tradesmen, and they told him that he must put a good price on his wares, so as to make allowance for taking something off. But my friend, being a fair, honest man, argued against this, saying, 'If I do that I shall be taking a mean advantage of other customers, who, trusting to my honesty, will give me the price I ask without a second question.'

After a great deal of thought my friend came to the very sensible conclusion that he would have to study his customers. If a customer spoke English in a natural way, and with apparent pleasure, my friend would not make allowance for reducing the price of an article. But if he judged his customer to belong to that class who are suspicious when trading in English, he would deal with that customer as he would with a Jew. My friend had lost several customers when he first opened his shop, all

because he had uttered these simple words: 'I have only one price for this article, and if I do not get it I may as well close my shop.' But, after losing those customers, he priced an article not so much according to its worth as by the kind of man or woman he was trading with.

Between two rows of trees,
Here let me take my ease;

To see the light afar,
Shining like one big star.

Is it not fine to lie
With boughs to change my sky;

Alone in this green way,
And let my fancies play?

Now as a growing boy
Will sometimes stand for joy

Tiptoe behind men small,
And raise himself as tall —

So shall my fancy's eye
See none more great than I.

It was very pleasant to breathe the pure air and hear the birds singing on this bright morning in May. I could lie on my belly in the grass like Nebuchadnezzar and feel more exalted than he felt abased. I knew from report that I would pass through fine country on this one

day in particular, and seeing that it was only ten miles from Neath to my journey's end, and I had all the day to do it in, I had an enthusiasm that I knew would last till the end.

I was in no great hurry to reach Glyn-Neath, so when I came to Cadoxton, one mile from Neath, I stood for a while to admire the beautiful little church at the side of the road. Seeing the quiet little churchyard, with the gate wide open, I went into it for a few moments, to look at the stones and graves. It was very quiet in there, and few people passed on the road to make me feel uncomfortable by being stared at for a stranger. I always like to read gravestones; and a very small stone, that has a grave no more than three feet long, where a child lies buried, always affects me more than large stones and monuments of full-grown women and men.

After reading a few stones I came to a large dark one, which I probably would not have read had I not been startled by one word in large capital letters on top. The word was 'murder,' and when I read on I was astonished, for I had never seen or read anything like it before in any churchyard I had been in. Here was no quaint verse to smile at, and no mention of the virtues of the poor girl that lay dead in the

earth. The whole writing was a cry of vengeance on the murderer, who had escaped justice and still lived. This is what I read:—

To record
MURDER.
This stone was erected
Over the body
of
MARGARET WILLIAMS
Aged 26,
A native of Carmarthenshire,
Living in service in this parish,
who was found dead
With marks of violence on her person,
In a ditch on the marsh
Below this churchyard,
On the morning
Of Sunday, the fourth of July,
1822.
Although
THE SAVAGE MURDERER
Escape for a season the detection of man,
yet
God has set His mark upon him,
Either for a time or eternity,
and
THE CRY OF BLOOD
Will assuredly pursue him
To a certain and terrible righteous
JUDGEMENT.

When I read the last part of this stone, about the murderer, I was astonished. For up till now I had always seen that space allotted to a peaceful little verse that praised the dead for their virtues, and saying that they had fallen asleep in Jesus's arms, or something else that was tender and beautiful. On very rare occasions I had read something quaint, but nothing so terrible as this. As soon as I had recovered from my astonishment I came to the conclusion that it was the most honest writing I had ever seen on a gravestone, and after reading it again I said 'Amen' three times.

In about half an hour's time I came to the village of Aberdulais, where some very fine waterfalls are to be seen. I had been told of these falls, so when I heard them and located the sound I made my way towards them, for they were not many yards off the main road, although they could not be seen from there. But when I stood in a good position to see them I felt considerably disappointed, because of the scarcity of water. What made my disappointment greater was that I knew, had there been no drought, these falls of Aberdulais would have been magnificent. The great bare rocks which I could now see should have been hidden in a torrent of water; and the pools below them,

shallow and quiet now, would have been one great body of dancing spray. The voice of this great waterfall ought to have put an end to human talk, but now it was no difficult matter for two friends to hear each other without raising their voices. In fact, I could hear the birds singing, and was sorry I had not come when these falls could have been seen in their true beauty with every drop of water turned into silver by its fierce wild life.

This walk up the Neath valley was wonderful. No doubt in my many travels I had often been in beautiful places, but they had been seen under a dull condition of life, whereas now I had no other object than to seek beauty and, finding it, give full leisure to its enjoyment. I had great hills on either side of me, parts of them being clad with trees and other parts green and bare. These hills were not always so close to the road but that there was room for a meadow or two; and when I came to places of that kind I always stood at the gates and looked at the horses, cows and sheep, and the little lambs that made such strange antics when they ran to suck the ewes. Sometimes I had a canal at my side, quiet and without a ripple, which further on made a loud deep sound as it forced its way through locks. And

sometimes I came to dingles that had little streams running through them; streams that were still in active service, in spite of the long drought. Eyes and ears were not the only organs that were tempted by this fine walk, for my nostrils often took in long breaths of air that was scented by the blossoms of May.

My mind was so full of nature that I did not trouble about human nature. Although I had passed quite a number of tramps, I had very little interest in their lives and characters. However, I was not to complete my walk without meeting one that would insist on being heard. As I have said, I had met several tramps, but they had all been men who, seeing that I was not inclined to notice them, had passed on without a word. But this time it was a woman, and as soon as I had caught sight of her I knew that human nature would have to be attended to. As we drew nearer, I saw that she was ill-dressed and dirty, but, of course, I could not expect anything different.

'Kind sir,' began this woman, placing a large basket she was carrying on her arm directly in my path, — 'Kind sir, remember that you have had a mother, and whether she's alive or in her grave give me a little help for her sake. When I married Joe Williams, my first husband, I

was very young, and I am now old enough to be your mother. Give me a penny and God bless you.'

This old woman was so dirty and ill-favoured that I gave her a penny at once, and stepped round her basket so as to continue my journey.

'God bless you,' she cried again in a halting voice. I thought the break in her voice was due to disappointment that she had not asked for more, seeing that she got the penny with such little trouble, and not due to grateful emotion. As soon as I was clear of the basket I made off, leaving her standing there and looking after me. But I had not gone three feet when she brought me to a standstill by crying, 'Wait a minute, sonny,' Turning round I saw that she had her hand in her pocket, and was curious to see what she would produce.

'Here,' she cried, coming forward as fast as she could, and holding something in her hand, — 'Here sonny, have a pinch of this.' With these words she held out a box of snuff, which I did not accept, but thanked her all the same. 'God bless you,' she cried again, as I continued my journey.

When I reached Glyn-Neath, I found it such a tiny little place that it would be difficult to get lodgings without going to a certain large

hotel. I did not care to go there, seeing that I had put on old clothes, which were none the better for the rough travelling I had already done. Thinking of these things, I went to the railway station and took train to Aberdare. When I looked from the train windows I was not at all sorry to have taken a ride, for I am sure I caught certain grand scenes that would have been entirely missed on the common road. In fact, some of the views were so grand that I had seen nothing more impressive even in America; and I began to see that we had scenery in our own country that was more than pretty and beautiful — that was sublime. I could see great deep valleys so full of trees that, to my fancy, races of pigmies or giants could live in them without being discovered. The train went up an incline seven miles long, from Glyn-Neath to Hirwain, and that accounted for the long wild distances that passed before my eyes.

I reached Aberdare in about three-quarters of an hour, where I arranged to stay at a restaurant near the railway station.

The next day I started for Merthyr, which was only four miles distant. However, it was the worst four miles I had ever walked in all my life. Not because it was two miles up a steep mountain, and two miles down the other side, but because of the roughness of the road and there being no fine scenery. And going down was worse than going up, for when I got into Merthyr I was so shaken by the last two miles that I could feel every part of my inside; my heart was beating, stitches were in my sides, a blister burned my heel, and something was gnawing at the pit of my stomach. I could now well understand the reason why the Welsh people hated walking, and rode to every place over a couple of miles from where they lived. I had been told in Aberdare that only one mountain divided that town from Merthyr, and that a strong able-bodied man would walk it in little over the hour. But the Welsh people did not walk it and preferred paying more than a shilling to ride in a train that went a roundabout way, and took an hour over the journey. Travelling in Wales is often a strange experience. One man told me that being in a small town and missing his train, he made inquiries

as to walking, for it wanted three hours before he could get another train. The fare by rail was tenpence, and the journey took more than half an hour. To his surprise he learned that the place he was going to could easily be reached in three-quarters of an hour by simply crossing a hill. Starting on this journey he got to his destination only fifteen minutes after the train he had missed.

On this particular morning there was a continual downfall of fine rain — a morning like this is common in the Welsh hills — and it was impossible to see far in the distance. However, I could see far enough to learn that the leafy country was at my back; and that I was now facing hills that were bare, on which the grass — the most determined of all life — had a hard struggle to exist. The country I had come through from Neath to Aberdare had been trees all the way. In fact, I feel certain a squirrel could have run through the trees the whole ten miles from Neath to Glyn-Neath without once coming to the ground, or making any extraordinary leap.

When I reached the *Halfway House* I decided to have a glass of ale and rest for a while. But I had such a hostile reception that I was soon on the move again. At this house there was a

big black dog which, when he saw me coming towards the house, began to bark and look dangerous. I thought it was very strange that a dog of this kind should be kept by a publican – a dog that tried to frighten customers away. However, I pressed my way past him and entered the house, where there was not one customer to be seen. When the landlady came, after I had been knocking for some time, I ordered a glass of ale, in spite of her cold looks. Taking the glass out of her hand I thanked her, but she did not thank me for my money, neither did she tell the dog to lie down, that was still barking at me. Without paying any heed to the good or bad graces of the landlady, I tried to make friends with the dog, but failed, to my surprise. For up till then I had always succeeded in making friends with dogs, just by uttering a few simple words. When I left the house and continued my journey I began to wonder why a few soft words, which had always succeeded before, had had no good effect on that particular dog. After a little while I came to the conclusion that he hated and suspected the English language, and that if I had addressed him in Welsh he would have taken my advance in a better spirit, and his mistress would have done the same.

Just before I reached Merthyr I met one of the strangest women I had ever met in all my travels; I expected this woman to beg of me, and was not at all surprised when she did so. However, when I gave her a penny, I was quite surprised to see her still standing in my way, as though she had some strange news to tell, and either did not know how to begin or whether I was the right kind of man to hear it. I could not help noticing her serious expression and the mournful light in her eyes.

'Are you ill?' I asked.

'No, I am not ill,' she answered in a quiet voice, and looking hard into my face. 'I am not ill, but I believe you come from London.'

'Yes, I do,' I said.

'If you do,' she said, her face being now all alive with a strange emotion,—'if you do, mark my words, there's going to be a death in the royal family.'

'How do you know that?' I asked, not daring to laugh in her face because of its earnestness.

'How do I know,' she cried in a high voice,—'haven't I got second sight? It's an awful thing to have, I can tell you. Still, I wouldn't be without it, no more than a mother would be without a child that worries her. Now, mark my words

again; there's going to be a death in the royal family.'

'How long have you known this?' I asked, pretending to be deeply impressed.

'I have known it since early this morning,' she answered. 'Last night I had a certain dream — the same dream as I had when I prophesied the death of King Edward. I dreamt that a tall man with a red beard came to my bedside, and leaning over me cried in three sharp tones, 'Alice! Alice! Alice!' 'Take your beard away from my face,' I said, 'and tell me is there going to be a death in the royal family?' Now, what do you think he did for an answer? He put his hand up to his mouth like this, and taking out three teeth placed them on the pillow at the side of my head. After doing this he nodded his head and left the room. Do you believe me *now*?'

Although I could not see anything in this dream that had any bearing on the royal family, yet, for all that, I could not help being impressed by this woman's strange personality.

'Before you go,' I said, seeing her about to move on, 'tell me whether it is a man or woman that will die.'

'Perhaps it will be a man, perhaps a woman, perhaps a child. All I can say is, there's going

to be a death in the royal family.' Saying this she waved her hand and began to walk away slowly.

'Tell me,' I said, detaining her, 'what brought you to Wales, seeing that all your interest appears to be in London.'

'I'm going to Swansea,' she answered, 'to look for a sister who was there ten years ago—but perhaps she is dead now.'

This poor woman's second sight was connected with the lives of kings and queens, but it could not tell her whether her own sister was alive or dead. It was hardly likely that this woman showed her peculiar madness to everyone she met. There was not the least doubt that all her thoughts were in London, and connected with the royal family; but had I not confessed that I came from that city, it is hardly likely she would have told me her dream. She had expected me to be deeply impressed, and I not only did not let her go away disappointed in this, but I also gave her three pennies instead of the one she had asked for and expected.

I reached Merthyr about noon. It was still raining and I could see that the whole day was doomed as far as sunshine was concerned. Judging by the great number of wretched little houses I saw, I think the housing of the poor could have been made a very important subject

in Merthyr. I could see hundreds of houses that were as bad as anything I had seen in the slums of London. One little boy told me that there were four rooms in his house, which not only accommodated his father, mother, three brothers and two sisters, but also lodged Mr. Jones who worked with his father. He had only told me what I had expected. The Welsh people were as overcrowded as the people in the slums of London. But there was this strange difference: the people in the slums of London were very poor and could not afford to pay for more room, whereas these Welsh people earned good wages and could afford to live in better and larger houses but could not get them.

On going into an eating-house for dinner, I made inquiries and found that they could put me up for the night. I was very glad of this, for I had seen something on the wall that gave me a little confidence in the respectability of that house. It was a card on which I read the following words: —

Christ is the Head
Of this house;
The Unseen Guest
At every meal;
The Silent Listener
To every conversation.

There was also a card which said: 'Put thy trust in the Lord.' And another which said: 'No trust, pay on delivery.'

On the following morning I started for Tredegar, which was about eight miles from Merthyr. But I had three miles of houses before I got into the open country, because of Dowlais on the hill. It was not a very pleasant walk, for I saw the same wretched, dirty little houses of which I had seen so many in Wales.

As soon as I got clear of Dowlais I was on the bleak, bare hills, and was surprised to feel a cold, cutting wind, in spite of its being the month of May. In fact, I had not gone far when I had to cover my left cheek with my hand owing to a stinging pelting of hailstones; and the wind was so strong that I was sometimes almost lifted off my feet. I could now well understand why people often fell and died of exposure when crossing these bare hills on a winter's night and being caught in a storm. It was not very long before I passed Rhymney, which lay to the right of me about a mile off the road. I knew from report that it was a dirty smoky little town, but it looked pleasant at this moment, for the sun made the roofs of the houses shine like silver, and the smoke that went up from the various chimneys was as white as

the summer clouds they travelled to. I was very much surprised to hear the cuckoo, seeing that the country was so bare of leaves. My experience of that bird has always led me to place its haunts where there were plenty of trees, and not such a place as this, where bushes were scarce and big trees were entirely absent.

When I arrived at Tredegar it was just about noon. But I was not hungry, and only wanted a glass of ale as a reward for my eight miles' walk. With this thought I entered an inn, where I found only one man present, who was the landlord. However, I had hardly been seated two minutes before another man entered, by his appearance a collier, smoking a short clay pipe. This man greeted me in a friendly way, and I answered him with the same cheerfulness. However, he did not appear much inclined to talk, and I could not sit there at his side in comfort without saying something or other, but had no idea of what subject to start on. I knew that the poorer classes in Wales have very few interests besides singing, football and fighting, although I had had proof that cricket as a summer game was beginning to create a little interest. Unfortunately the football season was now over, and that subject would not meet the ready welcome I desired.

Now I do not know what possessed me that I should start on the dangerous subject of fighting, but I certainly did, almost immediately, saying, 'Have you got a good fighting man in this town of Tredegar?'

'Yes, indeed we have,' answered the Welsh collier, looking at me with a great amount of interest.

'What has he done?' I asked, meaning that I was interested in an account of his battles, and feeling very pleased that I had started on a welcome subject.

'He has beaten everything around here,' answered the collier. 'He has fought ten battles, look you, and never been defeated.'

'Have a drink,' I said, to show how well I appreciated his friendly talk.

'Thank you,' answered the collier, drinking his ale and pushing his glass towards the landlord to be refilled.

As soon as the glass was refilled he raised it to his lips, saying in Welsh, 'Here's health to us all.' Hearing this I nodded to let him know that I understood, and taking a drink at the same time, which was expected of me.

'So he's a good man, is he?' I began, returning to that most welcome subject. But before I could say another word the Welsh collier

said, looking at me kindly, 'Wait here, mun, for one moment, and I will come back.' Hearing this I remained seated, not so much to wait for him as to have a few moments' rest.

I had not been seated there more than two minutes when the collier returned with another man at his heels. The stranger, whom I looked at at once, was clean shaven and young, not being more than twenty-four or twenty-five years of age.

'Now, look you,' began the first collier, 'here is the man I told you of, and although he is not much more than a boy he will fight you for anything from five shillings to ten pounds.'

'Ay, I will, mun,' exclaimed the young fellow, looking at me with a pleasant smile. 'I will fight you for anything you like, and at any time, Ay, indeed I will.'

'You have made a mistake,' I said at last, feeling somewhat alarmed at the turn things had taken, – 'You have made a mistake. I have not come to Tredegar to fight, and am not much good at that kind of a game.'

'Indeed, I am truly sorry, mun,' said the first collier. 'But I thought you would fight the best man in Tredegar! Ay, indeed, mun – but you have a man that will fight him?'

'No,' I hastened to say, 'I am neither a fight-

ing man, nor a fighting man's manager. You have made a mistake, but there is no harm done.'

'After the matter was thoroughly explained, the collier insisted on paying for a round of drinks, and made me understand in further conversation that he thought he was doing me a kindness by bringing a man forward to fight me. I could not account for my indiscretion in starting so dangerous a subject, being a stranger in a strange place. Of course I knew that all these little towns had their fighting men, and were proud of them, and that the subject would be popular, but it was quite dangerous for a stranger to show interest in a matter of that kind.

I reached Ebbw Vale, two miles from Tredegar, about half-past one and, having had a good dinner at a temperance restaurant, arranged to stay there for the night. In the afternoon I walked about the town, and found it much more pleasant than I had expected, in spite of the great ironworks that was surrounded with black smoke. It had been a wretched morning — hail, rain and a strong, cold wind — and most likely a fine afternoon, which turned out to be sunny, accounted for my pleasant time in Ebbw Vale. I found a small green space,

perhaps a couple of acres, that had seats, and there I sat sunning myself, with the hills all around me. The works close by made a noise like great waves beating against rocks, and made me sometimes think I was near the sea. In the evening I went out again and called at an inn for a glass of ale.

It was all quiet in the front bar, but I could hear several loud voices in a back room. But although I felt strongly inclined to join their company, yet for all that I did not like to walk boldly into their midst, knowing that they were all strangers. Moreover, they were Welsh, and I have spoken enough about Welsh suspicion. If one of them addressed me in that tongue, and found I could not answer him, my presence would have been none too welcome. Of course, I knew enough of their nature to know what answer to make if addressed in English. I would not have said that I came from any part of Wales at all, for they would then have despised me for not knowing the Welsh language. And it would not have been safe for my life to have said that I came from an adjoining town, for I knew how these Welsh towns, divided by a mountain only, hate each other, as I will show in the next chapter. If anyone asked me where I came from, and I answered

London, I knew well that that answer would mean safety and respect. London is such a great mystery to the inhabitants of small towns that anyone is respected who calls such a place his home.

While I was thinking of these things the men in the back room began to sing. Hearing this, the temptation to join them was so strong that I picked up my glass of ale and walked boldly into the room. As good fortune would have it, there happened to be an empty chair near the door, and I sat down without causing any interest, so I thought. But in this I was wrong, for it was not long before all eyes were turned my way – the eyes of ten colliers – and the next moment not a sound was to be heard, for they were all using their eyes to converse with each other. I never felt so uncomfortable in all my life, for I saw that my coming had upset their comfort. My only course was now to say something to win their confidence. So I began this way: 'Don't let me disturb your singing. Although I am a Welshman, belonging to London, I still have to come to Wales to hear good voices – except when Wales sends good voices to London.'

The London bait took well, as I had expected, for one of the colliers asked at once, 'What is

your part of London? I have a cousin there, and his name is David Williams.'

'But look you, Johnny Jones,' interrupted one of the others. 'London is a very big place and I will now bet you a quart of beer that this stranger has never seen Dai Williams.'

At this moment one of the others, who appeared to be more interested in beer and song than in me, London or David Williams, began to sing. This was fortunate, for he had not sung a dozen notes before they all joined him.

The singing I heard in this inn was quite remarkable, and I don't know any other part of the world where in a common public-house such fine harmony could be heard. For it must be remembered that these men were no more than rough colliers whose voices had not received any training at all. I noticed with surprise that although one of the singers was small, delicate and consumptive-looking, yet for all that he had a powerful bass voice that was rich and deep; whereas another, who was a giant of flesh, had a voice as soft and sweet as a boy in a cathedral choir.

I always like the old Welsh hymns which these colliers sang, and could have sat listening to them all the night.

There is one thing that must always be said to the credit of the Welsh, and that is, no matter what they do, whether they drink, burn or riot, they never forget to sing hymns, and sing them too with splendid feeling.

After we had had quite a number of serious songs, in which I had joined in the chorus with thorough enjoyment, the whole company looked towards a quiet, very respectable-looking man of about middle age, as a reminder that he was expected to sing. As soon as he became aware of these glances he rose to his feet, and clearing his throat began his song. The song was an old negro melody, which I had often heard before in America and this country.

The words and the music are so good that it still sounds fresh every time I hear it, and it always rouses me to help with my own voice. For the landlady's sake, who had looked into the room and laughed, we sang the chorus several times over. It only consisted of a few simple words, and here they are: —

Make way for my black Venus,
No coon can come between us;
Along the line we'll cut a shine —
That high-born girl of mine.

Not caring to drink too much, and being

ashamed to sit longer than an hour over two glasses of ale, I left that bright company and went down through the town for a walk. However much I disliked this dirty and smoky little town by day, I could not help being struck by a certain grandeur about it when, standing on the hillside at night, I saw the great works in the distance, the fires of which were kept burning day and night. The great volumes of smoke looked very impressive at this time, and it was almost uncanny to see the men moving like black shadows in the fire.

I found the people of Ebbw Vale inclined to be more friendly than in other parts of Wales — with the exception of Neath. The English language seemed to be expected of me and caused less suspicion. In fact, I had not been in the town ten minutes before a man told me his life's history in a few words. This happened at the place where I had had my dinner. After he had gone the landlady came in and appeared very friendly indeed. And when I went back there to tea, after arranging to stay there overnight, she told me all her domestic troubles; of how she had left a drunken husband, how he had tried to take the furniture from her, and how she had won the lawsuit by herself. She appeared to be a good kind woman and

I was very sorry to be the only lodger she had that night. Perhaps my own manner had something to do with my friendly reception in Ebbw Vale, for knowing that I was now in my own native county of Monmouthshire I had entered the town with confidence. No doubt my face had a pleasantness that people liked to see.

On the following morning I went into the main street of Ebbw Vale so as to get a newspaper before starting on my journey to Abergavenny. When I was returning, for my road lay the other way, I saw two men standing still and staring at another who had just passed by. 'Is that an Abertillery man?' asked one of the two, addressing his companion, and pointing towards the third man, who was now some distance away. Hearing these words I turned my head and then saw that the man who had spoken was frowning fiercely and had his two fists clenched, as he stood waiting his companion's answer.

'No, come along,' answered his more sober companion, 'he is not an Abertillery man.' Saying this he started to move forward and his companion followed, now frowning with disappointment. I could see, of course, that these two men had been drinking, early as the day was – spirits most likely – and knowing the meaning of their words I was very glad to see the third man escaping without bodily harm. For had he been an Abertillery man these two Ebbw Vale men would have assaulted him at once, without the least provocation.

Why? Because there was a steep rough mountain between Ebbw Vale and Abertillery, and this mountain prevented the two towns from growing and joining together, and for that reason they were bitter enemies. When the men of Ebbw Vale visited Abertillery they were set upon and beaten, and when Abertillery men went to Ebbw Vale they were served in a like manner. The same state of feeling is often caused by a river when it divides two towns, especially when the towns are in different states or counties.

I remember once making a trip to Glasgow on a cattle ship, which would have been pleasant had it not been for a quarrelsome cattleman. When we had paid for our own beds at a lodging-house this quarrelsome fellow, who was called 'Shanks,' began to quarrel with another cattleman called 'Cigarette.' We were then in the lodgers' kitchen where there were about a dozen Scotchmen, most of them being seated at a long table with porridge in front of them. But we had not been in the kitchen more than five minutes when Shanks began to quarrel with Cigarette. At last Cigarette said to me, 'Come, let us go out for a walk and see the city.' Saying this, he turned to Shanks and said, 'We don't want to quarrel with you, but

if you are determined to make trouble, all you have to do is to stand up in this kitchen and tell these men that you are a Hieland mon.'

'Do you think I am afraid to do that?' cried Shanks with a savage look. The next moment he shouted at the top of his voice 'I'm a Hieland mon!' But the poor fellow had no sooner uttered these words than there was a dreadful silence, for all the Scotchmen looked at each other in savage amazement. The next instant all these porridge eaters dropped their spoons and sprang to their feet like one man. Before I could make the least move, being astonished at this effect, I received a heavy blow in the breast that sent me spinning into a corner, where I lost my balance and fell. But by good fortune the manager, whose office was in the next room, came rushing into the kitchen before more damage could be done, shouting in a voice of thunder, 'What is the trouble here?' At the sound of his feared voice the Scotchmen shrank back to their porridge, while Shanks and I began to scramble to our feet. It was then that I saw poor Shanks with his face covered with blood and his clothes in tatters. If it had not been for the quick arrival of the manager, no doubt he would have been made a case for the

hospital, and all because he had uttered these simple words, 'I'm a Hieland mon.'

'I remembered, of course, that we were then among Lowlanders, and no doubt the same thing would have happened in the Highlands if Shanks had stood up and boldly declared himself a Lowlander. But I never saw anything done so quickly before; for Shanks had no sooner finished his sentence than he was swarmed upon and the daylight taken from him. It was all over in a minute. For half a minute Shanks was a clean, respectable-looking man; the next half-minute he was no more than a bundle of bloody rags. Of course I had only been struck because I was in the way, and not that anyone had anything particular against me. As for Cigarette, he, artful devil, had disappeared, for he knew well what result to expect from those awful words.

When I met these two men in Ebbw Vale I was very glad, after hearing what they said, that the third man, who appeared to be sober, quiet and respectable, was not known to be an Abertillery man. Mountains and rivers will have a lot to answer for at the Day of Judgment, for they have always interfered with the affection of people.

On making inquiries I learned that there

were three ways to get to Brynmaur, a town I would have to go through to get to Abergavenny. One way was a path over a steep mountain, which was supposed to get me to Brynmaur in about twenty minutes, but which I suspected would turn out in the end to be the longest way of all. I had not forgotten what I had seen in Ebbw Vale, the extraordinarily steep places on the hillside, where rows of houses were built. Some of the roads to these houses were so very steep that the people who lived in them could almost have gone to bed by walking up the outside walls of their houses without taking the trouble to go indoors to use the stairs. The second road I was told was good, but that there was a bad dip before I reached Brynmaur. I did not like the sound of this, for if an Ebbw Vale man took the trouble to mention a dip at all, and to describe it as bad, it must be bad indeed.

The third road was much longer, but good all the way. So I came to the conclusion that the long road was the shortest after all, judging it by time. After I had been walking about an hour I came to a small town called Beaufort, which was only a short way from Brynmaur. In passing through this little town I was considerably struck by the difference in its looks

from the little towns in Glamorganshire. Although the houses and cottages were no larger, yet for all that they looked richer and ever so much more superior. The doors had brass knockers, brass letter boxes and brass numbers, which gave the little houses a refined look. And when I looked at the window curtains and saw how clean they were, I knew that I had at last come among people that took a pride in their homes, however small their houses were. Again, I saw several women polishing the brass on the doors, scrubbing the threshold, or window cleaning, and none of them were gossiping. To my surprise these women did not look at all like household drudges, but were dressed clean and neat enough to welcome any visitor that might come along unexpectedly.

It was not long before I began to realize that I was entering a different kind of country altogether, from bare, rocky hills to leafy ones. In fact, the change was so sudden, all within a couple of miles, that it took me completely unawares. I began to see woody hills that reminded me by their beauty of those that had been so common in the Neath valley. When I came to an inn called the *Forge Hammer,* I had to force my way past a great fat pig that lay sleeping in the doorway. This proved to

me at once that I had left collieries, tin, copper, plate and iron works behind me, and that I was now in an agricultural country. Moreover, I began to see stables at the side of the houses, and all the little cottages had laburnum, laurel and other trees in front of them. Instead of meeting pale, sinewy colliers, I began to see a number of fat, red-faced farmers driving fat horses to and from Abergavenny. I could get clean lodgings at a place called the *Hen and Chickens* I had been told in Ebbw Vale. So when I got near the town I began to make inquiries, and having found it, paid for my bed and went out to see the main buildings.

Seeing a respectable-looking inn, after I had been walking here and there for nearly an hour, I went into it and remained long enough to drink six glasses of ale. At this house the ale must have been very strong, for, to my surprise, I felt that I had had quite enough for that day. However, I did not show it much, except that I was perhaps a little slower in movements and speech.

But when I reached my bedroom it was a different matter, for I now took so many precautions against robbers that it was a clear proof my mind was not altogether what it should have been. For instance, when a man

has had too much drink, he always thinks his mind is wiser and more alert than at another time, and that he is more capable of attending to his own safety. So, on this particular night, I not only looked under the bed, but also placed a chair against the door, the door being already locked. Not only did I do this, but I also placed a china ornament on the extreme edge of the chair, so that if the lock were picked the least attempt to open the door would have sent the ornament to the floor with a crash. But even after taking these artful precautions I was still not satisfied; for, instead of undressing and getting into bed, I only pulled off my hat and coat, and then lay down in that state.

Now it must not be thought that I was taking these tramps without being armed. My arms consisted of a stout cane, in which was a strong, sharp toledo blade, about three feet long. So on this occasion I lay dressed – with the exception of the things I have mentioned – on top of the bed with the sword unsheathed and ready at my side. In this position I fell asleep.

I don't know how long I slept: all I know is that I opened my eyes and by the dim light of a street lamp I saw a figure standing at the foot of the bed. For a moment or two I could

not realize where I was, but after a little while my senses gradually came back to me and I knew that I was in a strange room where I had never been before. 'I have just woke in time,' I thought, 'for someone is in my room.' With great suddenness I sat up in bed with the sword in my hand. 'You have made a mistake by coming into this room,' I said, holding the sword ready for action. Saying this I naturally expected to see the man run out of the room, but to my surprise he did not stir. However, I was not so hysterically excited as to stick him, without giving him a chance to escape uninjured, so I said in a threatening voice, 'Do you hear? If you don't leave this room at once, I'll run you through the heart.'

Of course I had enough sense to know that if I wounded this man it would place me in an awkward position in spite of his guilt. I should be detained by the police for days, perhaps weeks, and all my private affairs gone into. However, if he had made the least motion towards me, I had fully made up my mind to stick him, and to stick him well.

But, in spite of my threat, he did not move one way or another, and it then dawned upon me that the figure might not have any life at all. Putting my leg out of bed, but still keeping

my eye on the figure, and with the sword still ready for action, I drew near, and it was then that I saw my mistake. The figure was no other than the bedpost which, when I had first entered the room, I had dressed in my coat and cap instead of hanging these things behind the door. After making this discovery and laughing at my mistake, I undressed properly and got into bed, where I slept soundly till morning.

I have often been surprised at the different kind of effects that ale has on the human mind. Two kinds I know well and mention in particular: laughing ale and melancholy ale. One day a friend of mine, whom I had invited to have a drink, suggested that we should go to the *Church House,* where he said we should not be able to drink more than two glasses for laughing. Although I had my doubts of this, I said nothing, but let him lead the way. When we got inside the *Church House* I allowed him to give the order, for I did not know what to call for, it being a special brew. In giving the order I heard him say something about Scotch, and a certain number of X's. I noticed with surprise that when the drinks were served the glasses were very small and that the two drinks cost fourpence, a big price for such a small quantity of ale.

'It's about as dear as wine,' I said.

'Of course it is,' he answered, 'for it is as strong as wine.'

After we had emptied our glasses my companion invited me to have another at his expense, saying at the same time that two glasses were the limit for one man of that kind of ale, and that we would not be served in that house with any more. I was surprised to hear this, for, after having drunk the second glass, I felt like drinking several. However, after we had left the house and were in the open air, I began to believe my friend's words, for it was as much as I could do to keep from laughing. There was no cause to laugh, so why should I? I could not help noticing that my companion was very quiet, and knew that he was watching me from the corner of his eye, expecting me to laugh. I, of course, was doing the same, for I did not expect him to contain himself much longer. At last the inclination to laugh became so strong that I turned full on him, and our eyes met. That was quite enough, for we both fell into each other's arms, laughing helplessly. And so it continued all the way to his house, to the amazement of the hundreds of people we passed on the way. That was one of my experiences of laughing ale, which, strange

to say, was made in Scotland, where there is supposed to be a lack of humour.

Melancholy ale is a different kind altogether, for it turns men into weeping philosophers. It makes us question life and its mysteries. We lean against a wall, or cling to a post or rail, saying, 'Here I am now, but where shall I be in a year's time? In my grave perhaps, and a good thing too. We come and we go, and who cares? To-morrow I must work – we are born to be slaves. If I thought a child of mine would have no better luck before him, I'd tie a stone round his neck and drown him like a mangy dog.' With these sad reflections we go our way, complaining until we fall asleep.

The next day I left Abergavenny early, before nine o'clock, which was fortunate, for on making inquiries I learned that it was sixteen miles to Monmouth, which was more than I expected. However, I knew it was a beautiful country all the way, and that I would go through the historical little town of Raglan.

When I reached the *Clytha Arms,* which was a superior-looking and beautiful hotel, and nothing like the usual wayside inn, I could not help being struck by the beauty all around me. I saw the river Usk in a valley, with cattle and sheep in the fields on either side, and some of the sheep were walking on the clean, silvery stones at the riverside. Sometimes I saw old leafy walls, the boundaries of large estates, and I was often shaded by chestnut blossoms instead of common leaves. In fact, I sometimes thought I was not on the King's Highway at all, but trespassing in a nobleman's park.

Tramps were numerous in this part of the country, owing to some large waterworks needing men at Abergavenny. For that reason most of the tramps were looking for work. One man told me that more than a hundred men stayed at the Abergavenny workhouse on

the previous night. However, although I saw so many tramps of this kind, I was fortunate to see one at last that was of a different kind altogether. This man, who was shabbily dressed, and judging by his grey hair, was well on in years, was standing in front of some cottages, playing a concertina. He did not notice my arrival, for all his attention appeared to be on the doors and windows in front of him. So, when I drew near enough to touch him on the shoulder, he turned with a look of surprise and then stopped playing, to take the penny I held in my hand. After he had taken it and nodded his thanks, he turned his back and continued to play his instrument, and I, without waiting to hear his music, passed on. However, the *Red Lion* happened to be at the end of the cottages, so I called in there for a glass of ale. I drank it without sitting down, and when I left the house the musician was still at work. But I had not gone many yards when the music ceased, and I turned around to see the cause. I could then see that the man was going to the cottage doors to seek some reward for what he had done. In a few moments his business was over and, seeing that I was walking very slowly, it was not long before he caught up to me.

When he reached my side I could see that he did not know whether to pass by or not, having doubts whether his company would be welcome. So, to encourage him, I said, 'You play that instrument very well,' which was a lie. 'Yes,' he answered with a complacent smile, 'I play well enough for coppers, which are none too plentiful; but if I was paid in gold, like some of the musicians we hear of, I could surprise you.'

'What, with that instrument?' I inquired, pointing to the concertina.

'Yes,' said my strange companion, in a sharp voice. 'Yes, with this very instrument. I could almost make it speak if I was paid in gold like some of the musicians in London.'

'I thought you played very well in front of those cottages,' I said. 'Could you play any better if you were better paid?'

'Lord, yes,' he answered. 'Dress me in black, give me a white shirt, let me have hair on my shoulders, offer me £50 a night, and *then* see what I could do.'

Saying this he came to a halt, and I did likewise, wondering what he was going to do next.

'Listen to this,' he said, and began to play. After playing for a few moments he stopped and asked me what I thought of his music.

'Very good,' I answered, although I had heard scores of uneducated farm labourers and costermongers play better. In fact, I had to confess in my own mind that I had seldom heard a concertina played worse.

'So you think that was good,' he laughed, nodding his head. 'Perhaps it was, but I only was playing for coppers then. Now listen to this, for I am now going to play for gold.'

Saying this he pressed the keys so hard that I was startled by the sound that followed. This was meant to impress me. Then, going into another strain, he began to swing the concertina in different directions; now it was held to the right, now to the left; now it was down below his knees and the next moment it was held high over his head. When these manœuvres had been going on for about a minute, he stopped suddenly and with a self-satisfied smile said, 'That will give you some idea how I could play if I was paid in gold like those musicians in London.'

I was quite taken aback at this man's confidence, for I knew that no audience, however rough and uneducated, would have listened to such music for more than five minutes without showing some signs of disapproval. As for the difference in his playing for coppers and play-

ing for gold, I could see none whatever. The only difference was in the method and not in the music itself. For when he played for coppers he held the concertina in one position and stood motionless, but when he imagined himself playing for gold he made a great show of swinging it about in different directions. However, I did not think it worth while to tell the poor fellow these things, and said simply, 'Your music surprises me.'

He took this remark for praise and laughed with pride.

In a few moments after this we were passed by an Italian organ-grinder, who wished us a cheerful good morning, which I answered in the same kind spirit. But my English musician took offence at this and said, 'How can you be civil to those foreign organ-grinders?'

'Surely,' I answered, 'you ought to be friendly with a man of that kind, seeing he plays music like yourself.'

'What! *he* play music,' snapped my companion. 'He only turns a handle, and any idiot could do that. A real English musician can starve, but a foreigner can make a good living in this country just by turning a handle. Please don't compare me to him. The real musician is the man who can make his own notes. Does

he? No; but I do. A dirty foreigner can make a good living by just turning the handle of an organ, but a real English musician who makes his own notes is thought nothing of and can starve in his own native land.'

That the English concertina player was upset at meeting this Italian organ-grinder was quite clear, for as we went along he did nothing but swear and find fault with everything. He stood looking after a motor-car which flew past, shaking his fist at it. He said that rich men only used motor-cars because they were getting too mean to give a poor beggar twopence for holding a horse. He pointed to a gaily-dressed little girl and said that the child's mother ought to be damned well ashamed of herself for making her child look like a blasted little foreigner. More than once he commented on the foreigner earning a living by just turning the handle of an organ, while a real English musician who made his own notes was thought nothing of and allowed to starve. Not long after this we came to a few houses which were in Raglan, and I saw my companion eye them critically.

'Are you going to play here?' I asked.

'Yes,' he answered, 'but I am not going to give them the same music as I gave you a specimen of. Why should I give them my

best? I may only get one penny, perhaps not that.'

'Well, good-bye,' I said, 'and although I cannot afford to pay you gold for your best music, yet for all that I am only too pleased to give you another penny for what you have done.' Saying this I gave him another penny and then left him.

As I passed through Raglan I could see the castle on the left some distance away, standing on a hill and showing its dark walls between the leaves. Seeing a little boy going my way, I asked him if it was the castle, and he answered, 'Yes, but the people are gone away; do you know where they are gone to?'

'No,' I said, smiling to think that the castle was an old ruin and had not been inhabited for three or four hundred years. 'No, where do you live?'

'Next door to Miss Jenkins, who is not dead yet,' he answered. 'You know now?'

'No,' I said, 'I don't know where Miss Jenkins lives.'

'She lives in the house behind the green pump,' cried the little fellow.

'I have never seen the green pump,' I said.

'It's not far away from the pear tree in front of Mr. Williams' back door,' said the boy.

'I am a stranger in this part of the country and don't know anything at all about these things,' I confessed.

'But you know where Sally Smith lives with her father?' persisted the little fellow, who could not believe in my entire ignorance about these matters.

'Have you got a bad foot?' he asked with a sudden interest, seeing that I did not walk like ordinary men. This was a question I had expected at the very beginning of our acquaintance. 'How was it done?' he asked.

'An engine ran over it,' I answered.

'Oh, golly! Suppose it had been your head,' he exclaimed.

A few minutes after this we came to Miss Jenkins' house, the green pump, the pear tree, and the house where Sally Smith lived with her father. The other house, whose only distinction was that it was near these, was where the boy lived. So I gave him a penny and left him.

When I had passed through the little village called Mitchel Troy I only had a couple more miles to Monmouth, so I sat down at the roadside to take a few moments' rest. As I was looking around me to make sure that I sat near no dirt, I had my attention drawn to a flower, inside which a bumble-bee was lying at rest. So

I touched him lightly on the back, thinking he would either turn to sting me or rise grumbling and fly away. But instead of doing either of these things he only shook his fat little body and took a tighter hold on the bosom of his flower. It was his bed for the night, there could be no doubt of that; for the sun had now gone down. So I said, 'Good-night, my little friend,' and left him in peace and comfort.

As I walked along I began to wonder what kind of bed would be mine when I reached Monmouth. I came to the conclusion at once that it would not be as fine as the bee's. However, in spite of my fears, I found good lodgings at Monmouth. All through my travels I had had these fears, as to whether the beds would be clean or dirty, damp or well-aired. But I must say that I was fortunate in every instance, and cannot remember one place where I would not have spent a second night.

That night I was tired and went to bed early — at ten o'clock. I was not tired so much on account of the sixteen miles I had walked, but because of the warm sun I had carried all day on my head and shoulders. However, it was not my intention to go to sleep at once if I could help it, but to lie awake an hour and think over the day's travel.

When I undressed and lay quietly in bed, the silence of my surroundings impressed me greatly. I could not help thinking of the slums of London and other large cities, which at that hour would be crowded with people, children even. It was very pleasant to know that no drunken gossips would stand talking for an hour after midnight under my bed-room window, no parties returning from weddings or funerals – their clothes, and not their manner or condition to show which – twelve hours after the ceremony. No Mrs. Kelly returning from a christening, who happens to meet a friend returning from a funeral, when they are both charmed with each other's company until the alehouses close; after which they stand at one o'clock in the morning, under my window, loath to part. 'We don't know when we shall meet again,' sobs Mrs. Kelly. 'Perhaps never,' answers her friend, who is on the verge of hysterics. I thanked heaven I was far from such human miseries, which had disturbed my sleep so often in the past.

The following day, being Sunday, was spent in the old town of Monmouth, Judging by the looks of the houses it had altered very little during the last hundred years. This old town was beautiful, very much like Abergavenny, with its wooded hills all around and the fine houses that were to be seen among the trees. In this old town I felt quite comfortable, because I could stand and stare without being stared at. The reason of this was that the inhabitants were well used to strangers, owing to so many people making it their headquarters for a week or two when they visited the many beauty spots that are within easy distance — such as Symond's Yat, Raglan Castle, the river Wye, Tintern Abbey and other places. I was told that the town was healthy, there being no factory smoke of any kind.

I was interested in the old castle, where Henry V, one of our finest kings, was born. But I learned that there was very little left of the old castle, only a little of the walls. Unfortunately I could not see even this without first getting a pass, — as hundreds of militiamen were to camp around the castle for three

months. However, I was not greatly disappointed, for all these old castles and abbeys are very much alike, – two or three leafy walls, – and to see one is to see them all.

While I was standing on the bridge looking down into the river Monnow a man who was standing at my side drew my attention to a fish just under us, saying, 'Look at that trout; his weight is about a pound and a half. Do you fish?'

'No,' I answered, 'but I suppose you do.'

'Yes,' he said, 'and I have seen some good sport in this river, although it is small. Do you see that place down there under the market-house?'

Turning my head in the direction he pointed to, I saw a very old building, whose front was on the street, the back of it being on the waterside.

'Yes,' I answered.

'Well,' continued the stranger, 'that's where the big trout was caught. There's a slaughter-house under the market-house, and the fish come there for the offal that is thrown into the river. Now, in that place there was seen one day a very large trout, a monster for a stream like this. So a number of fishermen came and tried their best, but, do you know, not one of

them could land that trout. But on the third day a friend of mine, who was the fattest man in Monmouth and weighed forty-seven stone, brought his fishing tackle, and in less than half an hour that trout, which weighed five pounds, was caught and landed. Now, what do you think my friend's bait was?'

'I don't know much about fishing,' I answered. 'Was it a piece of dough, or a grub of some kind?'

'My friend's bait,' said the stranger, pleased to think I had not guessed it, – 'My friend's bait was a long tapeworm taken out of a live sheep.'

It was not long before I wished this stranger good-bye, for I did not care to hear any more fishing stories of that kind. The idea of a big, red-faced, fat man, weighing forty-seven stone, handling a long, thin, white tapeworm that would be alive was not very pleasant. As I knew nothing about the weight of fishes, this man could have told me he had caught a trout weighing fifty pounds and I should have believed him. But when he mentioned the horrible sickly-looking tape-worm in connexion with a tremendous heavy-gutted man, it was too much for my imagination. However, I could not leave him before he had told me of

the big salmon that had been caught in the river Wye, which was the record for that year. I could see nothing to doubt in this. But when he said that on the following day and in the very same hour and in exactly the same spot another salmon of exactly the same size had been caught by the very same man—I began to think that my new friend was getting excited. I came to the conclusion that the river Wye had inspired fishermen as well as poets.

On Monday morning I left the beautiful old town of Monmouth, making my way towards Tintern, which was eleven miles distant. I must say here that these fine walks in a country well known for its beauty, were spoilt by the great number of motor-cars and motor-cycles, especially the latter. I can well understand the joy of riding, but to race over the land at such a great speed that cyclists dare not turn their eyes to either side, is surely not a healthy state of joy. Why do these people invade a beautiful country if their only object is to ride with great speed? for any country that has well-kept roads would answer their purpose. The motor-cars were little better, for they travelled at such a rate and made so much noise that they always occupied my mind even when I was on the path near the hedge and in apparent safety.

These foolish people have settled places of interest, and have no care for beauty on the way. Of course, if they enjoy that kind of life there is nothing to be said; but it seems a pity that they cannot enjoy themselves without interfering with the pleasure of others. They raise so much dust that the hedges, which ought to look fresh and green, are almost as white as the road itself. And when we go into the country to smell the may, these people give us a strong, unpleasant smell of oil. Although a poor man, I can get more enjoyment out of life than another man, because of the power of my imagination. For that reason I do not envy the rich having comfortable cars; but I am annoyed to think that they could ride with more joy to themselves and others if they went slow enough to study the things they pass. But when they are in that little iron world of their own they seem to despise the greater world beyond.

My lodgings at Monmouth had been very comfortable. I paid a lump sum in advance for board and lodging up till Monday morning, and had some fears of the consequence. But these people did not take advantage of the arrangement, and I left well satisfied with my treatment. When I was clear of the town, about a mile and a half on the road, I suddenly

became aware that I was followed by a big, hulking young fellow about six feet high. Seeing that he was walking slowly like myself, and not feeling comfortable at having him just behind me all the time, I stood still, pretending to admire the scenery, so as to give him a chance to go by. However, when he reached my side, I did not let him pass without wishing him a pleasant good morning. When he heard my voice he came to a standstill at once, but, to my surprise, stared at me without saying a word. One look was quite enough, for, judging by his owl-like eyes and wide-open mouth, I at once came to the conclusion he was daft. Whether that was the case or not, I will leave my readers to judge by the following conversation. It must be remembered that this young man, who was such a big fellow, asked these questions in a simple child-like manner, without the least sign of a police examination. Judging him to be quite harmless, I answered his questions in the same straightforward way.

He. 'Where be you going?'

I. 'To Chepstow.'

He. 'Is your mother and your father there?'

I. 'No.'

He. 'Who do keep you, then?'

I. 'I keep myself.'

He. 'How?'

I. 'Somehow.'

He. 'Have you got any money?'

I. 'Yes.'

He. 'Did you find it?'

I. 'No.'

He. 'Did you steal it?'

I. 'No.'

He. 'Where did you get it from?'

I. 'Worked for it.'

He. 'How much have you got, coppers and all?'

I. 'I don't know exactly.'

He. 'Will you let me see?'

I. 'Not now.'

He. 'Will you lend me fourpence?'

I. 'What!'

He. 'Lend me threepence, then; indeed, it is not much.'

I. 'What!'

He. 'Come, lend me twopence, then.'

I. 'What!'

He. 'Lend me a penny, mun, for that is nothing.'

I. 'What, nothing?'

He. 'Well, good-bye.'

I. 'Good-bye.'

However, I could not let this simple young

man go without giving him something, so I offered him a penny, which he took with a loud laugh. To my surprise, he had no sooner received this penny than he turned back towards Monmouth. It seemed he had come out of that town on purpose to beg some money. That he should have attempted to borrow fourpence from a complete stranger was extraordinary, for I don't suppose he had ever succeeded in doing that; and how artful he must have thought he was, to tell me that twopence was not much, as though I would not know the value of money.

After leaving this simple young man my road lay side by side with the river Wye. It was a dull morning, almost to tears – an ideal time for fishermen, a number of whom were to be seen on the banks, but bad for fishes and poets. However, the sun came forth now and then, and I could see the river Wye shining like a silver blade in a green handle. I had this beautiful companion with me all the way from Monmouth to Tintern, a distance of ten miles, sometimes singing and sometimes quiet; and showing an interesting face all the time.

When I reached Tintern it was still early, but I decided to stay there for the rest of the day and to start for Chepstow on the following

morning. I wanted to see Tintern Abbey by moonlight, as I had seen it years before, but this was impossible. For when I went out after dark I saw that the moon was far too young to affect those old ruins. My thoughts had been so busy with the abbey ruins that I had not studied the condition of the moon. As a local poet puts it:—

> To see old Tintern Abbey right
> Please visit it by pale moonlight.

Although I saw a number of hotels that catered for summer visitors I did not stay at any of these, but preferred to look for a private cottage. After making one or two inquiries I succeeded in finding one. However, I did not scorn the hotels by any means, for I had several glasses of ale before I left Tintern.

When I went out in the evening and stood looking at the abbey ruins, I cannot say that I felt well satisfied with my present state. This discontent was owing to my memory going back to my boyhood days. I remembered that I had come from Newport to Tintern, a distance of seventeen miles, when I was only a boy of fourteen, to see how this abbey looked by moonlight. At that time I was working as an errand boy in an ironmonger's shop, and

it was after midnight when I got back home, and I had to rise at six the next morning to be at work by seven o'clock.

As I stood there now, twenty-seven years after, and compared that young boy's enthusiasm with my present lukewarm feelings, I was not very well satisfied with myself. For instance, at that time I would sacrifice both food and sleep in my travels to see anything wonderful; but now, in my prime, I did not go seeking things of beauty, and only sang of things that came my way by chance. Thinking of this, I came to the conclusion that the boy of fourteen, who came seventeen miles to see a ruin by moonlight, was as a poet the father of the one that stood there in his prime. Judging myself by that wonderful feeling in boyhood, I felt sure that I was only a shadow of what I should have been. However, perhaps this despondent feeling was owing to the absence of the moon, and the fact that the abbey could hardly be made out at all. Whatever it was, I did not feel very happy, and a couple of glasses of ale made me feel more melancholy than ever.

The country between Tintern and Chepstow is striking indeed. I was now walking on the hillside with the river Wye deep in the valley below. Across the valley I could see wooded hills, with here and there rows of steep white rocks which on the summits looked like fortifications.

I had not gone far when I came to a large open field between me and the water, in which I saw scores of sheep and lambs. Something must have disturbed them – perhaps the farmer had taken one of their number away – for they were now making the finest chorus of sounds I had ever heard in my life. The shrill voices of the baby lambs and the deep tones of the old sheep made a chorus so arresting that I could not help listening until their voices gradually died away. Even if I had had a big day's journey before me instead of a short one, no more than six miles, I could not have helped giving them my ears as long as the chorus lasted, so tender and sweet it was.

When I had walked about four miles from Tintern I saw a small village before I reached Chepstow, which was about two and a quarter miles from where I was. But just before I reached the village I had my attention drawn

to a man on a green patch at the side of the road, who was then in the act of placing some rags and other things in a large bag. I suppose he had been sorting them, for I saw several things he had discarded and thrown nearer to the hedge. Of course I could see at once that this was a rag and bone man. He was a short, thick-set fellow of about fifty years of age, no cleaner than the ordinary tramp, but his hair was not long, neither were his clothes dirty, ill-fitting or old. From this I gathered that he handled more money than the ordinary tramp, and that he had in his quest for rags, a better opportunity of getting clothes for his own body.

'Come and have a drink,' I said to this man, when I had reached his side, and pointing to the village close by.

He looked on hearing this, quite surprised, and answered, 'Thank you, mate; I will, as soon as these things are in my bag.'

'I like to stand treat to a fellow like you,' I said, as we walked along, 'for I know you don't make much profit out of old rags.'

'It's no good to complain,' he answered, with something like a sigh; 'but I have been very prosperous in my day, believe me or believe me not.'

When I heard this I came to the conclusion

that he had been a man of some consequence in the past – an employer of men, a master, or a man of property. However, we were now in the *Piercefield Hotel,* the landlady was waiting for an order, so I asked my new companion what he would like to drink, and he answered, 'A pint of beer, mate.' The landlord drew this and also a glass for me.

After these drinks had been set before us and we had both drunk to each other's health, I said to the rag and bone man:

'You say you have been prosperous in your life; what brought you down. This?' With these words I pointed to the beer, thinking a liking for strong drinks was the cause of his downfall.

I may say here that some time before this I had been shown a document which belonged to a very poor man who sold penny toys in the streets of London, and who lived in one of the cheapest common lodging-houses in the slums. This document was the freedom of a large city, which proved that the poor toy seller was at one time held in great respect. I was thinking of this case when I was talking to the rag and bone man, and was prepared to believe any tale, however extraordinary, of a great man's fall from respectability.

'No,' he answered to my question; 'it was not drink that caused my downfall, it was unfair competition.'

'How was it done?' I asked, taking another mouthful of beer, as a hint that he should do the same and have his mug refilled when it was empty. I don't know whether he understood my action or not, but he certainly took another big pull at his beer.

'Yes,' he continued, after he had placed the mug back on the bar. 'Yes, my prosperity was blighted, believe me or believe me not, by the unfair competition of a fish hawker. Two years ago I was living at Hereford, where I had a sixpenny bed every night without fail. There were several villages within easy reach of that town, and the people got to know me so well that they would not part with a rag, bone or bottle until I called on them. They used to save them for me, and for that reason I was always sure of making two and three shillings a day, especially when rabbit skins were in season.

'My prosperity lasted about two years, and then I began to see that something was wrong, but had not the least suspicion of what it was. People who had been good customers of mine began to say coldly that they had neither skins,

rags, bones nor bottles, and I began to wonder why. Now, one day, I was about to call at a certain cottage, when there happened to be a fish hawker at the cottage next door. It was then that I saw something that almost turned me into a cold rock. For at that moment, a woman, an old customer of mine, brought a rabbit skin to the door, which, believe me or believe me not, she shook before my very eyes. Then to my further astonishment – for I had no firm belief in what was going to happen – I saw that fish hawker place the rabbit skin in his basket; and then, believe me or believe me not, give the woman a bloater out of his basket. When I saw this the blood surged through my body, and rushing forward I shouted, "What is going on here? You are not a rag and bone man, but a fish hawker. It's the likes of you that ruin trade for the likes of me."

'So saying I ran back to the road, for I had seen a small hand-cart there, and wanted to see what was in it. When I looked I saw a large bag, which I felt, and, believe me or believe me not, sure enough it was cram full of skins, bones, rags and bottles. As soon as I was sure of this I was so furious that I ran back into the garden, and getting a tight hold of that fish hawker's basket, I wrestled with him until the

garden path was strewn with fresh herrings, bloaters, cockles, kippers and shrimps. After doing this I made off, knowing that my trade in that part of the country was ruined for ever.

'But I have never been able to do so well since, for, believe me or believe me not, as a rag and bone man it is as much as I can do to make one and sixpence a day. Unfair competition – that was the cause of my downfall. I had as good a trade as any man could wish for, for there was not a woman within six miles of Hereford that would part with either a rag, bone or bottle to any other man but me, until a fish hawker offered to exchange his bloaters and shrimps, and ruined my prosperity for life. My trade was so good that I could have done with the assistance of a donkey, if I had had enough money to buy one. When I think of how these things are now being exchanged for penny herrings, instead of being paid for in cash by a professional rag and bone man as I was, it almost breaks my heart — believe me or believe me not. And remember this – my pennies were always fresh and sweet, which is more than can be said of some of that man's bloaters and shrimps. Those people will know that some day, if they don't know it already. They'll know it when they see a man,

woman or child lying dead in a coffin, poisoned by bad fish. But I have nothing to say against those people; *they* were all right. All my grievance is against the man who would not stick to his own trade and, not satisfied with hawking fish, went into the rag and bone business and ruined a man who, believe me or believe me not, was ten times better than he was.'

When this long recital was at an end, the rag and bone man finished drinking his beer and waited to hear what I had to say. However, his was hardly the kind of story I had expected, and I knew that he would only repeat it in further conversation. This poor fellow had never had his age of gold, in spite of his boasted prosperity in the past; and even his age of silver had been very small. For that reason I preferred to continue my journey, especially as I did not want any more ale for myself. But I did not like to leave him without doing him another kindness, so I placed sixpence in his hand, saying, 'Do what you like with it, but I must go now.' I was very glad to see that he pocketed the money instead of calling for more beer, and followed me out. When we got outside I wished him good luck and we parted, he going towards Monmouth and I towards Chepstow.

When I reached Chepstow it was quite early in the day, and I felt sorry that I had not another six miles to go with the beautiful river Wye for my companion all the way. However, I had quite a number of pleasant fancies to think about and, when I had arranged for my lodging and was shown upstairs to a sitting-room, I settled down to smoke and dream.

I had not been there five minutes when two fine elderly ladies came into the room, with the waitress at their heels. These ladies banged the windows down at once, in spite of its being a hot sultry day. After doing this it took them about three minutes to be seated. In fact, they owned the place for the half-hour they were there, and all they spent was three-halfpence each.

When these two fine ladies first entered I could not help noticing, by the way they looked at me, that they had expected a room to themselves, and were plainly annoyed at having to spend their three-halfpence each in the presence of a third person, and that a stranger. However, I was soon engrossed in writing, and I don't know whether they talked about sheep's trotters or silk. They could have planned a murder without lowering their voices, and not a word would have reached my ears.

THE BLIND BOXER

He goes with basket and slow feet,
To sell his nuts from street to street;
The very terror of his kind,
Till blackened eyes had made him blind.
For this is Boxer Bob, the man
That had hard muscles, harder than
A schoolboy's bones; who held his ground
When six tall bullies sparred around.
Small children now, that have no grace,
Can steal his nuts before his face;
And when he threatens with his hands,
Mock him two feet from where he stands;
Mock him who could some years ago
Have leapt five feet to strike a blow.
Poor Bobby, I remember when
Thou wert a god to drunken men;
But now they push thee off, or crack
Thy nuts and give no money back.
They swear they'll strike thee in the face,
Dost thou not hurry from that place.
Such are the men that once would pay
To keep thee drunk from day to day.
With all thy strength and cunning skill,
Thy courage, lasting breath and will,
Thou'rt helpless now; a little ball,
No bigger than a cherry small,
Has now refused to guide and lead,

Twelve stone of strong hard flesh that need
But that ball's light to make thee leap
And strike these cowards down like sheep,
Poor helpless Bobby, blind; I see
Thy working face and pity thee.

I FOUND Chepstow Castle without much difficulty, for several signposts pointed the way and there was no necessity to inquire. When I looked at that fine pile of ruins I could not help being impressed at the great changes of time. These walls which were once so dangerous, being alive with armed men, were now used only by the birds that built nests in the crevices and reared their young. The surroundings of the castle were beautiful indeed, for it stood in a green valley that had many a noble old tree. The green valley would have been a fine haunt even if there had been no castle there with a greater attraction.

The day I left Chepstow must have been market day, for I was passed by quite a number of drovers in charge of cows and muzzled calves, and many a cart carried a sow that was too fat to walk.

The question of religion must have been a burning one in Chepstow, for I had not gone far when I heard a hedge trimmer say to his companion on the other side of the hedge:

'I never knew a chapel man do any good yet.'

'Neither have I,' answered his companion. And in less than an hour after this I was told by a little boy, whom I had questioned about his parents, that his father was out of work, but that Mr. Smith could still find work for a chapel man.

When I came to the little village of Gaerwent, five miles from Chepstow, I could not help wondering whether that quiet little settlement had its mind divided between church and chapel; whether the church was critically surveying the doings of the chapel and the chapel acting the same towards the church. I came to the conclusion that this was likely to be the case, for I remembered an experience of my own a few years back. I was then living in a small village, such as I was now in, and was visited one day by the local clergyman. After about twenty minutes' conversation there came a knock at the door, just as I was about to open it for my visitor to leave. Opening the door, with the clergyman standing behind me, I saw to my surprise that the new-comer was the dissenting minister.

My surprise was very natural, seeing that I had been living in the village some time and

neither of them had paid me a visit before. This will account for my astonishment at being visited by both at the same time. However, I soon recovered my presence of mind, and, shaking hands with the clergyman, prepared to welcome the other. But, instead of taking any notice of me, the dissenting minister set his eyes on the cleryman, to the confusion of both of us, for we could not fail to see the severe expression on the man's face. Then, putting his hand in his pocket, the dissenting minister, with his eyes still fixed on the clergyman and in utter silence, took out a tract, which he held before him. 'Thank you,' I said, preparing to take the tract, for I had not been seen in any place of worship, and was therefore in need of a little encouragement. But as soon as the dissenting minister saw me make this move to take the tract, he waved it away, and the next instant offered it direct to the clergyman. 'Ha, ha!' laughed the clegyman in utter confusion, but taking the tract all the same, 'I must now wish you a good afternoon.' With these words he made off as fast as he could.

As soon as the clergyman had gone, a change came over the dissenting minister, for, with a very sweet smile, he offered me another tract,

which I accepted. After this he nodded good afternoon and then followed on the heels of his rival in religion. When they had both gone I sat down, astonished at being the witness of such an incident. The dissenting minister, by insisting on the clergyman taking a tract first, had clearly and plainly said, 'You, a clergyman in the Church of England, you, sir, are a greater sinner than the man you visit, and in more need of tracts than he is.'

On looking over a gate at a number of sheep that lay contentedly chewing the cud, I was surprised to see one poor beast in the middle lying on his side, with his face buried in the grass and kicking his legs. There was no doubt that the poor thing was dying, but what surprised me was the utter indifference of the others. For there they all lay, lazily chewing the cud, in happy unconcern, and not even casting one glance at their dying companion.

When I got to the *Rising Sun* I was only five miles from Newport. Unfortunately I could not enjoy my ale at this house, because navvies had been there. I could tell this by a strong smell of onions, and in some things I am not as strong as I used to be. The principal food of a navvy consists of bread, cheese, onions and beer, and I have known many a navvy that

would not walk ten yards without having a raw onion in his pocket, which he would not be always able to get in a place where other things were plentiful. Owing to this strong smell I could not stay long at the *Rising Sun,* and soon drank my beer and left.

After I had left this inn I wanted a quiet walk alone to Newport, for I was likely now at any time to meet someone who knew me, seeing that I was born in that town and spent my whole youth there. But this was not to be, for I now met the most persistent beggar I had ever known. This man was going towards Chepstow, and meeting me on the road, came to a halt and said, 'Shall I go on to Chepstow or turn back, which is it to be?'

'Please yourself,' I answered; 'it is a long way to Chepstow and the day is late.'

'Yes, it is eleven miles to that town,' he said, 'and it is now four o'clock. So I will turn back and stay another night at Newport.'

With these words he turned and began to walk at my side, much to my annoyance. This man soon began a long story of his troubles, but I could not possibly be interested in them at that time, for I became conscious that people were taking an unusual interest in me. They could see that he was a beggar and that I was

not, and perhaps some of them thought they saw something familiar in my face. However, in spite of having my attention drawn to other people, I gathered from this poor fellow's conversation that his downfall was owing to the death of his wife some years previous. He told a tale of how she once came seeking him at a public-house, and he, feeling ashamed that he was spending money in drink that could be used better at home, ordered three pennyworth of port wine for her, and invited her in to drink it. 'But my wife, who is now in her grave, would not touch it, either in the house or out,' said my new companion; 'and it is there yet for all I know. She brought nine children into the world and would not touch drink, not even when the doctor recommended porter to make milk for her sucking baby.'

I gave this poor fellow threepence and then crossed the road so as to continue my way alone. So many tramps had told me stories of this kind, how their homes were broken up by the loss of a wife, that I have now come to the conclusion that a great number of honest men are made tramps through that. The woman keeps the home together through poverty and prosperity, and when she is dead the man goes astray and never cares to be put right again.

Such is the beginning; the end is that the man finds a strange pleasure in wandering here and there and begging with success.

After leaving this man I called at an inn for a glass of ale. While I was standing at the bar I suddenly became aware of a man's voice behind me. Not hearing what he said, and thinking he was addressing me, I turned my head at once, and then saw a short, ragged fellow standing there with a basket of nuts in his hand. The man was blind, I could see that. However, before I could open my mouth to speak, the barmaid, who had seen him come in, said in a sharp voice, 'Out you go; you are not allowed in here.'

Some of the men too began to complain, and one of them, being drunk, told the poor fellow to go to hell with his nuts, and threatened to kick him into the street. In spite of this, I had the courage to take twopence out of my pocket and place them in the man's hand. But when he felt my hand touch his, he closed on it with such a sudden strong grip, that I almost cried out with the unexpected pain. No doubt he meant to show that he still had enough strength in his arms to strike heavy blows, if he could only see his enemies. And when I saw the working of his face I felt sure

that he meant me to understand that such was the case.

I felt pity for this poor fellow, for I remembered the time when he was feared by the whole town, as large as that town was. Even now, though he was getting on in years, it was hardly likely that there were ten men in the whole town who would have dared to insult him, if he only had the sight of one of his eyes. The poor fellow knew this; and to hear himself cursed and threatened by men who, had they seen the least light in his eyes, would have given him their last shilling and almost kissed him, must have been painful to bear. I was very sorry for this poor fellow.

As I was crossing Newport bridge I felt a touch on my shoulder, and turning my head saw before me a man that I had not seen since I was a boy. At that time he was young and but newly married, being about twenty-four years of age. However, in spite of the number of years that had passed, I did not fail to recognize him almost immediately. But I was rather surprised that he should have known me, seeing that I had gone through the change from boyhood to manhood since we had last seen each other; whereas he, being a full-grown man, had not altered nearly so much.

'Are you Will Davies?' he asked.

'Yes,' I answered, 'and I know who you are, too. Come and have a drink for the sake of old times.'

As soon as we had crossed the bridge we went into the *Old Green,* where I called for drinks. This old friend soon began to tell me of the various papers in which he had seen my name, and ended by slapping me on the shoulder and saying, 'I always knew that you would succeed, my boy. Don't you remember showing me some poetry years ago, which my wife liked so much? Won't you come and see her, Will, before you leave the old town?'

Yes, I certainly remembered showing him a poem, which I wrote when I was about fourteen years of age, and which was called 'Death,' but I have always had my doubts as to whether he really admired it or not. At that time I was only an errand boy, but as my grandmother allowed me to keep my wages for pocket-money, I was continually being asked by my elders to buy beer for them. This young married man, who had my poem in his possession had asked me to call for it at his house one Saturday night, saying that his wife would not be satisfied until she knew the author of 'Death.' So I went there, having five

shillings in my pocket, and was introduced to his wife. They were both so pleased to see me that they could hardly contain their laughter, and it was some time before the young wife could say, 'I'm so delighted to meet the author of 'Death.'

It was the first time I had ever been called an author, and I was so pleased that before I left I paid for two pints of beer for the husband and a bottle of stout for his wife, in addition to my own two bottles of lemonade.

Thy water, Alteryn,
Shines brighter through my tears,
With childhood in my mind:
So will it shine when age
Has made me almost blind.

How canst thou look so young
On my fast changing flesh
And brooding cares that kill —
Oh, you sweet witch as fresh
And fair as childhood — still?

When I reached Newport I settled down for a few days, seeing old friends. I made inquiries for one woman I had known in my early days. At that time she was well on in years, but it never once occurred to me now that she would either be dead or at a very advanced and helpless old age. Time had dealt so lightly with me that I forgot the difference in our ages, and expected to see her not only alive but much the same as I remembered her nearly twenty years before.

When I was a small boy this woman had given me so fearful an impression that even now after so many years I should not feel comfortable in her presence. After I had known her for some time I noticed that she never had

her head uncovered and always wore a soft cap made for a man. And I, childlike, began to wonder why. One afternoon, when I saw her in a room huddled up asleep in front of the fire, I suddenly made up my mind, being full of mischief, to remove her cap and hide it, thinking she would enjoy my fun when she woke. With this intention I went softly to her side and began to raise her cap, using the most gentle force. But when I had taken it clear off her head, I saw, first to my surprise and then to my horror, that two curled horns were sticking out of her head. To make certain that I was not deceived by her hair taking this strange shape, I felt them, and sure enough the horns were hard and made of solid bone.

I don't know whether the cold air coming to her head made her wake, or that she woke by accident, but wake she did, and suspecting or feeling that I had tampered with her cap, which I had now replaced, gave one loud, unearthly screech and made a grab for me. But I had suspected this, and was out of her reach in a second, leaping for my life. I had never seen so evil an expression on a face before, and had never before heard so devilish a sound. I really believe that if that old woman, who up to that time had shown me nothing but loving kind-

ness, had got me into her long, skinny arms at that moment, she would have torn me to pieces.

When I inquired for this strange woman I was told she had been dead for some time. Of course, when I came to consider matters, I was not surprised at this.

One woman, a relative, to whom I paid an early visit, was still hale and hearty in spite of her seventy-two years. On the afternoon of my visit she was also visited by two other women friends who were much older than herself. So I had the honour of being entertained by three elderly women, each one being over seventy years of age. True, there was not much laughter, but notwithstanding that there was a good deal of interesting talk. For instance, the eldest of the three claimed that war could be stopped at once by a special hour of prayer, when all Christians — excluding Roman Catholics, who were an abomination unto the Lord — would kneel for that purpose. 'And now,' she continued, 'let us all kneel down and pray for the extermination of England's enemies.' It was very fortunate for all that she still continued to talk, for, after a long speech that lasted twenty minutes, she had forgotten her invitation and said no more about kneeling down to prayer.

'What a spirited woman that was,' I exclaimed to my old relative, after her two visitors had gone.

'Yes,' she answered, 'but she is not so spirited as she was a month ago, for she has only just buried her mother, and that is a trial for a woman of seventy-eight years of age.'

The town of Newport is, taking it on the whole, very beautiful, owing to a great part of it being built on the sides of hills. Parts of the town are wretched, but no worse than can be expected from a large seaport. But when a man is once on Stow Hill, which can easily be reached in a few minutes from any part of the town, he begins to see at once that the town has a remarkable beauty of position, which could hardly be spoilt by anything man could do. From various parts of this hill the Bristol Channel is to be seen, the islands in it, and the outward- and homeward-bound ships. And this fine sight is to be seen again at the other end of the town, from another hill called Christchurch.

But the most beautiful part of Newport is the green country called Alteryn, which has a clear canal coming down lock by lock, with Twm-Barlum in the distance. I had not been in Newport long before I went walking in that

direction. When I was well out of town and stood on a hillside road where I could see down into that wonderful green valley, I became deeply affected at the sight. For there was not the least change; there were the same few little cottages that I had seen so often when a boy. The place seemed to smile at me, and in a little while I began to feel tantalized and tormented that it was still the same, whereas I myself had undergone so many serious changes. 'It will be the same,' thought I, 'when I am dead, although my life may be only half over now.' For I could see myself coming here a feeble old man, who was now in his prime, and still finding no difference in Alteryn. For over half an hour I leaned on a gate, looking in all directions, but there was no other life than the cattle in the fields. It is only in the heat of summer when men and boys come to swim in the canal, that this green solitude is made noisy by human tongues.

As I was undecided what move to make next, I went to call on a friend who knew the country for miles round, to consult him about a walk of three or four more days, that would end at Cardiff. So I went to see him, knowing that he was the right man to advise me in the matter. However, when I met him, we began

to talk of so many other things, that I clean forgot the cause of my visit and came away without the least idea of where I would go on the morrow.

We talked of a fine mansion that a rich man had built for his bride; but the bride never came and it was turned into stables, and had been stables till this day. Instead of being inhabited by a happy human couple it had become a home for cattle.

After that we talked of Gutto Nyth Bran, which means Gutto of the Crow's Nest, and who was sometimes called 'Gutto the Wind.' He was a native of Llangralto in the Rhondda Valley, and the fastest runner ever known in South Wales. I had heard of one great performance in particular, which happened when Gutto was a boy. One day when his mother thought of making bread she found on looking that there was no barm in the house. 'What a pity that is,' she exclaimed, leaving the house to tell her next-door neighbour of her disappointment. It was now that Gutto showed his extraordinary powers, for as soon as he saw his mother leave the house he sprang to his feet and, taking up an empty jug, made off with all speed. The next moment he was running his fastest towards Llantrissant, which

was eight miles distant, that being the nearest place where barm could be had for certain. When his mother returned from explaining her trouble to her neighbour she saw, to her surprise, a jug of barm on the table and, guessing what had happened, said, 'Gutto, you are well called the wind.' Her son had run sixteen miles while his mother had been next door to say a few words to her neighbour.

After talking about these things for some time I wished my friend good-bye, having no idea where I would go on the morrow. However, before I settled down for the night, I decided to make Pontypool the end of my next day's journey.

Leaving Newport the following morning I made my way towards Pontypool, which was about ten miles distant. The last face I saw, to know by sight, was the face of a pleasant cheerful-looking Jew. Yet this big, prosperous-looking man, always smiling, had had several great disappointments, enough to drive a man of his tribe to suicide. He belonged to a club, whose members were mostly Gentiles, and the club had a kind of lottery from which its members drew every year chance prizes, such as clocks, pictures, ornaments or geese, and as fortune would have it this unfortunate Jew won a leg of pork three years in succession.

In about an hour after seeing this man I was well out on the Pontypool road, having passed through Malpas and being a short distance from Llantarnum. The country I was going through now was well known to me, and the names I saw on the signposts of the cross-roads, such as Caerleon, Cwmbran and Pontnewydd, were familiar, although I had only visited them once or twice. When I reached the *Three Blackbirds* at Llantarnum I had my first glass

of beer of the day and enjoyed it very much. It was a good brew, mild and yet satisfying, frothy and yet without gas. I would most certainly have had a second glass if any company had been present. But as I was the only customer it was not long before I left.

Unfortunately for me, this day, which had been so fine in the early part, had now turned into one of those dull misty days that are so common where there are hills, and it was impossible to see very far away. But when I reached Panteg the air had cleared, to my sorrow now, because when I was passing a block of houses called by the simple unambitious name of Mary Ann Terrace I became a curious object to a number of playing children. They saw at once that I was a stranger, but the extraordinary thing was that they followed and made me the head of a procession. I did not know what to make of this, for they were all very quiet, as though they had great respect for me. The only reason I could give for this strange worship is that the children must have connected me with a show that was advertised for that place. No doubt the show was in their minds all the time, and every stranger would be expected to have dealings with it in some way or other. However, they soon got tired of following, and it

was not long before I had the road to myself again. Nevertheless, it was an exciting experience, because a number of grown-up people were standing at their doors, and I was very much afraid that they would think I had charmed their children away to their destruction, by promising them sweets and telling them lies.

Just before reaching Pontypool I overtook a small boy who appeared so friendly and self-possessed that I began a conversation with him. He had addressed me as though I had been his uncle, and I like to encourage a child who shows such fearless confidence in a stranger. So I asked him the first question that came into my mind, which happened to be interesting to a child.

'How do you like Christmas?' I asked.

'Jolly,' he answered, with a great smile. 'I wish it was Christmas now, don't you?'

'Yes,' I said, and then thinking of a fine joke to play on young innocence, I began as seriously as possible, 'Last Christmas I saw a woman that was a hundred years old and she was standing under the mistletoe. So I thought, "Here's my chance," and kissed her before she could make the least move to get away. It is not often that we get a chance to kiss a woman that is a

hundred years old. Do you blame me? Wouldn't you have done the same if you had been in my place?'

Saying this I looked at the little fellow and saw at once that he was struggling with some confused ideas. However, he said at last, coming to the conclusion that I had done something worth boasting of. 'Of course, I don't blame you. I only wish *I* had the chance.'

For five minutes after this I could not say another word for laughing, especially as the little fellow asked me several times what I was laughing at. Soon after this we came to a side road, which the boy prepared to take. But before leaving me he asked, 'Have you got any boots to mend?'

'No,' I answered. 'Why?'

Because my father's a shoemaker,' answered the boy, 'and when you have any that want mending, I hope you will give them to me.'

'I will if I see you,' I said, giving the little fellow a penny, and then leaving him. But I had not gone more than ten yards when the boy's voice brought me to a halt. 'When do you pay,' he cried, 'to-day or to-morrow?'

Of course I knew the meaning of these words and called back, 'To-day.'

No doubt the boy's parents were continually

being worried by customers that kept on saying, after the boots had been done and delivered, 'Tell your father we will pay him to-morrow,' which took a long time to come.

When the boy heard my answer that I paid to-day, he shouted back with lusty approval, 'That's right: I'll tell my father that you don't pay to-morrow.'

'When I got well into Pontypool, into the business part of the town, I went into an eating house and applied for a bed. Seeing that the landlady was satisfied with my looks and had accommodation, I was at once shown into a comfortable sitting-room. I heard no Welsh at all at this place, although several residents came in for light refreshments during the evening. Perhaps that was the reason why I was not regarded with any suspicion. In the course of the evening four men came into the room and, waiting to be served, began, as is usual with the Welsh, to blend their voices in harmony. This was very pleasant to hear. But when the tea and cakes arrived they began to tell stories. I like a good story, and if it is clever I don't care how much bad language is in it. But I have no liking for stories that are simply ugly. A story told by one of these young men is a good example of what passes for humour with the

lower classes in any country, Wales being no exception. It was about a girl being infatuated with an actor, much to the annoyance of her parents. At last the girl became so foolish that her father went to the actor and explained matters to him, asking his advice as to what was best to be done. 'Leave that to me,' said the actor. 'All you have to do is to invite me to your house to dinner, and when I leave, your daughter will not have a very great opinion of me then.'

The girl was very excited when she was told who was coming to dinner, and the parents, who knew nothing of the actor's plans, began to fear for the consequence. At last the actor came and, although he made himself very pleasant to the girl's father and mother, he appeared to be quite indifferent to the daughter. But when dinner was served he began to pay her some attention, to the surprise and annoyance of her parents. However, it was now that he was going to cure the girl of her love, for he made such a beast of himself that the girl was thoroughly disgusted and glad when the time came to leave the room. The actor had made the end of his nose wet with soup; he had used his bare hands both at once to carry the food to his mouth, and he kept blowing

his nose in the most objectionable way into his handkerchief. In fact, he made such a disgusting exhibition of himself that he not only cured the girl of her love, but also disgusted the parents in doing them that great kindness.

While these four young men were exchanging stories of this kind I noticed that one or another would turn an eye in my direction, to see the effect. No doubt they thought I should have similar stories to tell, which would be new to them, and which they would eagerly commit to memory. However, I kept my eye on the newspaper and did not give them the faintest smile of encouragement. In spite of this surly behaviour of mine, these men did not give the least hint that they were offended, which did not surprise me at all. For the Welsh observe one point of honour in particular, which is that so long as a stranger does not show open hostility he must not be interfered with. A stranger can go into any public-house where there are a dozen men the worse for drink and be certain of meeting no harm. In fact, the stranger himself can get drunk and insult the company if at the last moment when he sees that his arguments will lead to blows he has the sense to say, 'I am a stranger in this town.' These words seldom fail, and if he has

sense not to offend his company a second time he will be quite safe.

One time when I was in a public-house in the Rhondda Valley I saw a good case of this kind. The Welsh are slow to take advantage of a stranger, although he may deserve it. There happened to be present three men and their wives, a man sitting alone in a corner with a pint of beer in front of him, and myself. This man was there when we entered the room, and as none of my friends spoke to him, nor he to them, I judged him to be a complete stranger in the town, especially as the town was small. We had had several drinks and were all merry. So much so that it was not long before the women were laughing and dancing. All at once, in the midst of this merriment, a loud, clear voice exclaimed, 'Aristotle was Plato's pupil.' When I heard this remark I was quite taken by surprise. However, I soon came to the conclusion that the man was an eccentric old scholar, and now, being drunk, wanted to show his learning. But when the three women heard this remark they stopped dancing at once, dropped their skirts and looked at the stranger with their faces red with an angry passion.

'G'arn! What do you mean, you bad-minded villain,' cried one.

'We are respectable married women,' cried the second.

'We have not come here to be insulted,' said the third, bursting into tears.

The three husbands of those three women looked at the man slowly, and one of them, stepping forward, so as to be in easy reach to strike a blow, said, 'What do you mean by such language? A man like you is not fit to be where respectable women are.'

'All I have said,' began the stranger, striking the table with emphasis,—'all I have said is this, "Aristotle was Plato's pupil." There is no harm in what I have said, and please remember I am a stranger in this town.'

When the three men heard this they gave their wives a long look of helplessness, for the last sentence appealed to their honour, which told them that a stranger must not be taken advantage of. The stranger knew, eccentric and drunk though he was, that he had saved his body from harm, and did not utter another word as long as we were there, although the three women gave him many a dark look.

When I was shown to my bedroom at Pontypool I went to draw the blinds before I undressed, but I found to my surprise that there were none to draw. This discovery did not alarm me much, but I could not help thinking that the landlady must have been indelicate in a matter of that kind. However, when I got up the next morning I no longer wondered at her indifference. As I have said, I had gone right up into the business part of the town, but in the morning when I looked out of my bedroom window, which was at the back of the house, I saw no more than a wilderness, with dozens of black crows standing on the boughs of trees and flapping their wings round their nests. And no wonder I had spent a sleepless night. I had heard, so I thought, torrents of rain all through the night, and it troubled me to think of the condition of the road for my next day's walk. But I could now see that this noise was made by a small river at the back of the house, small but very active, and only a few yards away. When I got downstairs I asked the landlady the name of the river, and she said it was called the Afonlwyd, which meant the Grey

river. I only knew one thing about this town and that was, that it was once the home of Edmund Jones, called the Prophet of Pontypool.

He was a quaint old fellow, an Independent minister, and a great friend of John Wesley. The way he made up for a poor salary was a very sensible and excellent one. He used to send his servant on market days to market with a big basket, and she used to stand at the entrance and cry in a loud voice, 'Edmund Jones' servant.' Then one by one the good farmers' wives would give a pat of butter, a Welsh cheese or a few eggs. When the basket was full, the servant returned to her master. In those days great preachers did not, as they do so often now, have calls from God to leave a poor flock and serve a richer one.

When I left Pontypool and inquired my way to Crumlin, I had the same difficulty as I had had before, namely, that no one could give me certain information as to how I could walk to Crumlin, and that they could not help giving me directions how to reach the railway station and go to Crumlin by train. When I succeeded at last in getting the information I wanted, the man could not tell me the distance to that town; and yet Crumlin, I found out after, was not only quite a large town, but was also well

within six miles of Pontypool. This was another example which showed that the Welsh people are not good walkers, and are not interested in the King's highway. This was a fine morning, and when I saw the light on the hills round Pontypool I could not help being struck by their strange and peculiar beauty. These hills were not green and fresh-looking such as we see in an agricultural country, but sombre and dark. For that reason they owed all their beauty to the light. On the present occasion I could see green places and golden clumps and mossy banks that were almost as black as ebony, with a few spare trees and bushes dotted here and there. It was a beauty we do not associate with hills, which we always expect to be green all over.

This valley was full of collieries and other works all the way from Pontypool to Risca. So, of course, it was not only smoky, but had houses nearly all the way. In the seventeen miles I passed through Crumlin, Newbridge, Abercarn, Pontywain and Cross Keys, with Pontypool and Risca at either end, all of them being towns of some importance. And these towns were all in a valley and had their size in length instead of breadth; for that reason there was very little sign of the open country.

When I did happen to see a green bank, the sheep, three or four in number, always had their wool black with coal dust, and did not look very attractive. If all sheep looked like that they would never have got into poetry or on the painter's canvas. I was very sorry to see them at all in places of that kind.

But in spite of this valley being full of human life and activity, I did not think from what I saw that the houses were overcrowded, as was apparent in Merthyr and Dowlais. What a pity that people should have to earn their bread under such conditions. A man who has worked underground for twenty years should enjoy the sunlight for the rest of his life.

Before I knew that I was through smoky Abercarn, I saw a sign-board outside a shop post-office which told me that I was in a place called Pontywain. There had not been the least break in the houses, so that I did not know that I had changed from one town to another. I was feeling rather tired about this time and wanted a few minutes' rest. For that reason I intended to call at an inn as soon as I saw one to my liking.

It was not long before I came to one, and four reasons, all good, determined me to patronize it. Firstly, I was thirsty; secondly, I was

tired; thirdly, it was called the *Philanthropic Inn,* and it was the first time that I had ever known an inn to be called by that name. The fourth reason was this – I heard a most marvellous voice coming from within, and clearly leading a number of other voices. Being interested to see what the owner of this voice looked like, also being thirsty, tired and fascinated by an inn of that name, I entered at once and began to look around. As soon as I was inside I saw a small group of men standing in the middle of the room in a half circle. However, the landlady was expecting to hear something from me, so I gave her an order for a glass of beer. The men were now enjoying a chorus, the words of which were: 'Farewell, fare thee well, remember me.'

I could see at once without the least consideration that four of the men had no other object than to encourage the fifth to accompany them – the man with the powerful tenor voice, who had drawn me, as much as anything else, into that house. This man appeared to know that he had a very remarkable voice, for while he was singing he was pointing down his own throat. Seeing that he could not talk and sing at the same time, he intended to tell them by this action not to waver in their atten-

tion. At one time when he was coming to a very high note he caught hold of one of his companions by the sleeve and then, using his left hand to point down his own throat, he shut his eyes and uttered the loudest, sweetest and most extraordinary sound I had ever heard in my whole life. It was wonderful how he did it, and yet he appeared to be no more than a common worker in the pits. I was so astonished at hearing the volume of this one particular note, that I involuntarily stepped forward to look into the singer's mouth, as he was inviting us all to do by pointing in that direction, and although I did not see a mouth that had a roof of brass or silver, yet for all that I still could hardly believe that such a sound came from common human flesh.

After taking this very high note which, as I have said, was a marvellous performance, the chorus came to an end. However, one of his companions soon started it again, and it was not long before the man with the great voice took up the refrain once more.

Soon after leaving Pontywain I came to Cross Keys, without having enjoyed any green country at all. Moreover, the houses had no gardens in front of them, and were as bare and uninteresting as the long common streets of

our large cities. And so it was all the way, with the exception of a few nice houses and gardens that were to be seen just before coming to Risca.

When I reached Risca it was about six o'clock, and being tired of my long walk I made up my mind to spend a quiet evening, if I could find lodgings that had a comfortable sitting-room. But as good fortune would have it, I met a friend whom I had not seen for some time and who recognized me as I was passing along. After having had a glass or two of ale we went to his house, where I had a late tea and then sat and smoked and talked till bed-time.

As my friend's time for rising in the morning was seven o'clock to let him get to work by eight, I asked him to call me at the same time, that I might have a long day for walking. For I had a large stretch of country to cover, seeing that I intended to make Cardiff the end of that day's journey, passing on the way through Machen, Bedwas and Caerphilly. Thus up in good time we left the house in company at a quarter to eight, he on his way to work and I going towards Rogerstone, a little town that was not far away.

I was very glad to get through Rogerstone, for it was even dirtier and smokier than the towns I had passed through on the previous day. There were some very large works there, which not only employed nearly all the men and boys of the district, but even others that came from Risca and Newport, the latter town being three miles away, and where they still kept their homes. These works filled the town and that part of the valley with dense smoke.

But when I reached the quaint little village of Bassaleg I saw at once that I had come into a beautiful agricultural country where the

sheep's wool was white as it should be. I now began to see stout farmers and their sons and servants with their red faces instead of the pale lean colliers and iron workers of the day before. However, when I got through Bassaleg with its beautiful white church, the home of the Welsh bard David ap Gwillam, I was told that my road to Caerphilly went through Machen, and I knew without more information that I was to go through another colliery district. In spite of that knowledge I was not much troubled, for I knew that the road between Caerphilly would be chiefly open and green country.

Perhaps this was the most pleasant walk I had ever had, owing to the friendliness of the people, for not only did the men greet me but even the women did the same. And when women greet a strange man, the district must have a friendly spirit that is exceptional. In fact, when I went into the inn at Machen the landlady was so easy, cheerful and talkative that I felt like a native of the town. At one time I put this friendly spirit to the test by turning my back on two men that were approaching, and pretending to be deeply interested in Machen mountain, which was in the near distance. But these men still greeted me and made me turn my face to answer them,

which was a real pleasure after all. I did not hear a word of Welsh all along this road, although every name that came under my notice was Welsh without the least doubt. Just before I got into Bedwas one name in particular drew my attention – it was the *Ty-yn-y-Pwll Inn,* which is as surely Welsh as Patrick Flanagan is Irish. I tried to pronounce it, but had to give it up in despair, coming to the conclusion that as there is no accounting for the way such names are pronounced, I should be quite likely to be near the mark if I called it Jones or Smith.

Not long after this I came to the little town of Bedwas, which has the river Rumney running through it. It is always pleasant to be in a town that has a river, and I don't think any place can claim real beauty unless it has this one form of animated nature.

I was soon standing on the little stone bridge, resting on its parapet for a while before I continued my journey into Caerphilly. It was on this bridge that Gutto Nyth Bran, the famous runner, whom I have mentioned in a previous chapter, met his death in an unfortunate manner. He was running a race against the champion of all England from Newport bridge to Bedwas bridge, and being the winner, the

farmers who had gathered to see the result were mad with excitement. But unfortunately one old dame could not contain her joy, for as Gutto passed the winning post, still going comparatively fresh and strong, she struck him a blow on the back, crying out, 'Well done, Gutto.' When Gutto received the blow he fell to the earth, and when they picked him up he was dead.

After having this little rest, I pushed on towards Caerphilly, a town that is so well known for its old castle and a certain good cheese, and also for a market town of some importance. As I did not intend to stay there overnight, and still had a long walk before me, I was very glad to hear that I should pass close by the old castle without going a step out of my way on the road to Cardiff. It was not long before I saw the ruin close at hand, and, judging by its size, the castle must have been very strong in its day. Seen from where I stood, it looked so well preserved that I would not disillusion myself by going in between its walls to see their decay. So, after taking a long, admiring look, I continued my journey, being well satisfied with what I had seen, and without envying the two visitors I saw walking close to its wall.

The road going out of Caerphilly towards

Cardiff was very steep and mountainous. For a well-made road it was the steepest I had ever seen. From different parts of this road one could get wonderful views of the town and the surrounding hills. The strangest thing was that this mountain, over which the road went, was a green wilderness without a house of any kind to be seen. In fact, the road went through a country that was open and green nearly all the way from Caerphilly to Cardiff, a distance of six miles. Moreover, the road, well made as it was, did not appear to be used much by either pedestrians, or the traffic of horses and carts, or any other kind of conveyance. With the exception of a few cattle here and there, I seemed to be the only living thing on the mountain. It was not until I got within three miles of Cardiff that I began to see much human life. This walk from Caerphilly to Cardiff surprised me very much, for I knew that the latter was a large city, and I expected its suburbs and outskirts would have reached out so far that there would have been only a couple of miles of green country between it and Caerphilly. Instead of that it was open country nearly all the way.

When I was about half-way between the two towns I was overtaken by a stranger who, with-

out the least reserve, began to walk at my side and talk. I judged this man to be no more than a common worker, in spite of his clothes, which were good and black. It is seldom that the poorer classes of Wales buy any other than black as a change from their working clothes. The reason of this is that they pay so much respect to the dead in attending funerals, that every man is expected to have a suit of black in readiness at a moment's notice. A Welshman loses several days' work every year in order to do this, and often to oblige people he hardly knows.

Judging by this man's clothes, and seeing that it was not a general holiday or Sunday, I came to the conclusion that he was either under the doctor's care or out of work for a little time, but not in straightened circumstances.

'Are you a preacher of the gospel?' he asked almost at once, to my surprise. Perhaps it was the large black tie that I wore, so as to cover a shirt that might get dirty, which made him ask this question.

'No,' I answered; 'what made you think that?' And then, wondering what effect my words would have, I added, 'I'm not a parson, I'm only a poet.'

'What!' exclaimed the stranger, coming to

a halt in the road. 'What, do you mean to tell me that you're a poet?'

Of course I could see at once that this man had some respect for a poet, so I said again, seriously and proudly, 'Yes, that's what I am, a poet.'

After I made this affirmation he stared at me for such a long time that I almost burst out laughing in his face. At last he said, leading the way to a small gate at the side of the road: 'Come and stand here a minute, will you?'

The next moment he was at the gate and looking into a large meadow where there were about twenty cows lying or standing in different positions. I was soon by his side, for I knew no reason why I should not humour him, although I had no idea of what was to come of it.

'Now, this is a beautiful scene,' he began, with a rainbow sweep of his arm which took in the clouds, meadow and hedges that were its boundaries.

'It is,' I answered, wondering what he would say next.

'Well,' he said, 'if you are a poet, as you say you are, make poetry of it and I'll believe you.'

'I couldn't do that at a moment's notice,' I answered. 'I must have time for thought.'

He appeared to be disappointed at this, and then asked, 'Are you going to Cardiff?'

I answered that I was, and he said, 'Come, then, and we will talk as we go along.'

It was not long before the stranger again returned to the subject of poetry, saying, 'My wife makes poetry every time some one dies or a baby is born, and she knows a lot of poetry written by other people, as well as what comes out of her own head.'

'Do you remember anything written by your wife?' I asked.

'No,' he answered, after a long pause in which he had tried to remember something. 'No, but I know two lines by some one else which she often quotes.'

'I'd like to hear them,' I said, with real interest. The stranger cleared his throat and then began:

> 'Man works from sun to sun,
> But woman's work is never done.'

'Do you know these lines?' asked the stranger.

'Yes, I know them very well,' I answered.

'Ha! perhaps *you* wrote them,' he exclaimed in a voice of triumph.

'Oh, no,' I answered. 'These lines are very

old, and seeing that they are of such interest to women, most likely a woman wrote them.'

We went along chatting in this way until we came to an inn, where I came to a halt and invited the stranger to have a drink.

While we were there the stranger said in a coaxing voice, 'I wish you would write me some poetry on a piece of paper to show my wife and to prove that I have been with a poet.'

After a little thought I said: 'I will, but only on one condition, and that is that you will not read it until you get home.'

'I'll promise you that,' he answered. 'The fact is I can neither read nor write.'

When I heard this I was delighted and lost no time in writing out three little verses which were in my note-book in my pocket. When this was done I gave him the little sheet of paper with the poem on it, which he folded with great care and placed in the inside pocket of his coat. After this we left the inn, and it was not long before he wished me good-bye and good luck, for he was taking the road to Whitchurch, whereas I was keeping the main road to Cardiff.

As I went along after the stranger had left me, I began to laugh and wonder what his wife would think of my poetry, and whether

the man would be astonished at what his wife would read to him. For these are the verses, to which I gave a suitable title:—

To the Woman who will read this Poem to her Husband.

I am the Poet Davies, William,
I sin without a blush or blink:
I am a man that lives to eat;
I am a man that lives to drink.

My face is large, my lips are thick,
My skin is coarse and black almost;
But the ugliest feature is my verse,
Which proves my soul is black and lost.

Thank heaven thou didst not marry me,
A poet full of blackest evil;
For how to manage my damned soul,
Will puzzle many a flaming devil.

Soon after this man had left me, I was well into Cardiff with houses on both sides of me. In fact, I was walking on a well-made footpath at the side of the road, which proved that I was now in Cardiff without mistake, and I was passing so many people that I had to keep my mind from wandering, for fear of coming into collision with some one.

Perhaps that is the reason why a small boy who was collecting money in a cigar box took advantage of me. This little boy had held a box in front of me, and thinking he was collecting for some charity, such as the sick, the blind, orphans, the widows of drowned seamen, or the Salvation Army — I dropped a penny through a slit in the top, without the least thought of who or what was to benefit by what I was doing. For I have never, of late years, refused a penny to these collecting boxes, no matter in whose hands they are held or what kind of charity it is. However, before I continued on my way, it suddenly occurred to me that I had seen no letters of any kind on the box to show what the boy was collecting for. So I took a few steps back, and out of curiosity said to the boy, 'What are you collecting for?'

'My birthday,' he answered innocently.

'What!' I exclaimed in surprise. 'What! your birthday; suppose a policeman saw you?'

'If he did,' answered the little fellow, as innocent as ever, – 'If he did, I'd ask him for a penny.'

'How old are you?' I asked.

'I'm eight years old to-day,' said the boy, 'and my father mends boilers.'

'Never mind about your father,' I said. 'Don't

you know that you can be sent to prison for collecting money for your birthday?'

'Gar'n,' said the boy. 'Don't my mother know Mrs. Smith who married a policeman.'

Not caring to waste any more time, I left that innocent little stranger, wondering whether he, being such a good beggar at that early age, would ever become the leader of the Salvation Army. I could not help wondering how he had escaped the eyes of a policeman or an officer in plain clothes, seeing that he was so bold and without the least suspicion of wrongdoing. Judging by the sound when he had rattled the box to draw my attention to it, he must have succeeded in begging several pennies.

Making my way into the business part of Cardiff, I passed through Cathays Park, but it was then the dusk of evening. However, it was not too dark to see the fine public buildings erected there; and their size and magnificence made me think of London.

Although I was now tired, having walked more than twenty miles, I came to the conclusion that it was one of the best day's walks I had ever had, not so much for the beauty I saw as for the friendliness of the people I had met.

This ended my travels in Wales, and when I left Cardiff it was to take train to Bristol with the intention of walking part of the way back to London.

I had taken a seat in a carriage that only contained one other passenger, the carriage being in the front part of the train. I judged this man to be a gentleman farmer, and when he opened a basket and offered me an apple, saying that he could recommend it as it is the best fruit in his orchard – when he did this, I knew I had not misjudged him.

After taking the apple, which I put in my pocket, for I was enjoyng my pipe at the time, I began a conversation with him. But we had not been talking long when a guard who was going along the corridor stopped in front of our door and said, 'Are you nervous, either one of you?'

Being men, we of course said no, and looked to him for an explanation. 'Because,' he continued, 'the electric light has gone wrong in this part of the train, and when going through the Severn tunnel you will be in total darkness. But if you are nervous you can change carriages

and go to the other end of the train, which will be lighted.'

'It's all right for me,' I answered, looking at my fellow-passenger, to hear what he had to say on the subject. However, he was eating an apple and, although he appeared to be attentive, did not answer one way or another. So the guard, apparently satisfied, continued his walk along the corridor.

Not long after this we came to the Severn tunnel, and when the train passed in one second from broad daylight into total darkness, I must confess that the sudden change affected me unpleasantly. There was not the least glimmer of light, and it was the first time I had ever travelled under such strange conditions. Again, the train appeared to be travelling at such tremendous speed that I thought it must be beyond human control. The noise was so great that we appeared to be crashing through the solid rocks, and making our own tunnel as we went along.

However, I was determined not to lose the control of my nerves, although I knew that the experience would last seven long minutes. So when we had been in the tunnel for about a minute, which seemed ten, I closed my eyes and settled in my corner, feeling more at ease

and comfortable that I did not see the darkness. Unfortunately, about this time I heard a voice screaming not far away, and knew at once that my fellow-passenger was trying to tell me something. But I could not understand a word he said and, losing my temper, screamed back, 'Shut up; how the devil can we talk in this noise.'

Of course he could not hear what I said, and the next moment was screaming louder than ever, trying to make himself heard above the screaming cars.

'He's gone mad,' I thought, putting my hand out and feeling in the dark to make sure that he was not coming near.

I was just on the point of settling again when all at once I felt something strike my foot, and the next moment a heavy body fell right across my knee. It was my fellow-passenger, and I knew that he had to be restrained, for he had no right to have left his seat.

So I grabbed him round the arms below his shoulders, and held him fast, sitting on my knees; and if he had made the least struggle at that moment I was determined to find his throat and strangle him. 'Let me go,' he cried.

'Wait until we come into the light,' I answered in a loud voice.

'Are you mad?' he shouted.

To this I made no answer, but stuck to him grimly. But he was a big man, and using all his strength he gave a sudden jerk and was out of my arms almost before I knew it. His feet had been placed firmly on the floor and this had given him great power. As soon as I found he was escaping for certain, I let go and gave him a strong push, which made him fall into the opposite seat. After doing this I moved as quickly as I could without getting up, towards the end of the car. So that, if he intended to make a second attack, he would have to feel for me in the dark. When I was settled at the other end of the car, I sat there quietly feeling around me all the time, to make sure that my fellow-passenger was not searching for me in the same way.

Although I could not feel anything of him, yet for all that I still kept my hand at work expecting every moment that it would come in contact with a man's flesh or clothes. It almost seemed as if I would have to do this for ever, for the train was still crashing and screaming through the tunnel. However, the seven miles came to an end at last, and we found the light as suddenly as we had lost it, and the screaming noise fell at once into a deep soft purr. As soon

as I had the use of my eyes I looked for my fellow-passenger, and there I saw him standing in the corridor in front of the carriage door.

'What's the matter with you?' I asked sternly, as he entered the carriage.

'There's nothing the matter with me,' he answered coldly, 'but what was the matter with *you?* I only got up to close the window in the corridor, to keep out the foul air. Why didn't you do it when I asked you?'

When I heard this I felt ashamed, and hardly knew what to say. However, I told him at last that I thought he had lost his head owing to the darkness, the great speed we were travelling at, and the noise; and that I thought I was doing him a kindness in trying to hold him until we came into the light. Hearing this he laughed, but confessed that had he known what his feelings would have been, he would have changed cars. 'No more travelling for seven minutes in total darkness,' he said, taking another apple out of his pocket and biting a mouthful that reduced it by half.

It was certainly not a very pleasant experience. A little light would have made a great difference in the speed and the noise, because it would have restrained our imagination. As it was, it was the longest seven minutes I had

ever lived, because of the mistake I had made with my fellow-passenger. This adventure may sound absurd and ridiculous because of its end, but the truth is that I have seldom been so thoroughly excited in all my life.

It was now Saturday and, having reached Bristol in due course, I secured comfortable and clean lodgings at the first place I went to, which was in Victoria Street. I was very much surprised at the trustfulness of this landlady, for when I had dinner at midday and offered to pay her in advance for accommodation until Monday morning, she said at once, 'You can settle with me altogether when you go away on Monday morning.' I thought this trustfulness extraordinary, in fact foolish. For I should be going in and out without leaving the least luggage in her charge, not even a small hand-bag.

After I had had tea on this Saturday evening I went around some of the old haunts which I used to frequent years before. My chief interest was to find a public-house called the *Goat and Armour* which used to be on the Narrow Quay. But when I got there I heard that the *Goat and Armour* had been done away with for years. I was considerably surprised at this, for I had so much confidence in its life, knowing that

inns, like churches, were very long livers indeed. So it can be imagined I was disappointed to hear such bad news.

When I was a boy this house was kept by a Newport man, who was known to some of my people, but who was now dead. As I stood at the spot twenty-five years after, I began to think of the past, the amusing things that had happened there. But, thinking of the great changes that had come since, I did not feel very much amused at the remembrance.

At that time I came as a boy of sixteen or seventeen years of age, with some of my elders, on a two days' excursion to Bristol. When we arrived we lost no time in coming to the *Goat and Armour,* where we intended to sleep that night. We reached it about noon, and after we had had dinner, the landlady – a small wiry little woman – proposed that we should all go for a drive during the rest of the day, leaving the landlord to look after the house. He, being fat and good-natured, and older than his wife by some years, seemed to be pleased at this suggestion and hurried us off, so that we might get the best of the day; we being four in number.

When we returned, after having been for a long drive, stopping at various places for re-

freshment, it was getting late in the night. However, the landlord appeared as jolly as ever, and did not seem the least annoyed at being left so long alone. But that night, after we had all gone to bed, I was suddenly awakened by hearing a loud voice saying, 'Are you going to get me some bread and cheese and mustard? You have been out all day and I want something to eat.'

This was the landlord, complaining to his wife; but she, whether awake or not, made no answer that I could hear.

'Are you going to get me some bread and cheese and mustard?' he shouted again, in a still louder voice.

At last, failing to get an answer, although his wife must have been wide awake, he began to scream like a little child, 'Bread and cheese and mustard! Bread and cheese and mustard! Bread and cheese and mustard!' How long this would have lasted I cannot say, for all at once I heard a heavy thud which shook the whole house; and then in the silence that followed a woman's voice said calmly, 'There you are; there's bread and cheese and mustard for you.'

She had pushed him out of bed, and he, being fat and something the worse for drink, was too much shaken to get up from the floor, although

no doubt he made several attempts. After hearing him groan for a while, I could hear no more from either of them, so he must have surrendered to his strange position and fallen into a heavy sleep. When I got up the next morning there was not the least sign that the landlord and his wife had had a difference in the night, for they both greeted me with the utmost cheerfulness. Seeing this I began to doubt whether such a thing had happened at all, and my first thought was that I had only dreamt it.

Thinking of these things, and feeling rather melancholy as a result, I entered the first public-house I came to and ordered a glass of ale. The landlord appeared to be very sociable and friendly, so I talked to him of Bristol and my experiences there in the past. But we had hardly been talking five minutes when the door opened and a stranger entered, walking carefully.

'Hello, William,' cried the landlord cheerfully.

Hearing this, I turned my head and then saw that the new-comer was a blind man, with a tin cup hanging from his neck.

'Half a pint of beer for William,' he said, as soon as he reached the bar; then, taking the money out of his pocket and feeling it care-

fully, he held it in his hand on the bar, and did not, as other customers would, let go the coins until the landlord was ready to take them direct from him. The poor fellow knew that some one else was present, for he had heard me move to make room for him to reach the bar; and he did not know whether I was a thief or an honest man, and for that reason held his money until the last moment.

I have always had great sympathy for the blind, and have often given them pennies when I could afford no more than fourpence for a bed. The blind are the world's children that never grow independent. King's must make way for them and the fine proud duchess must step into the gutter to let them pass. The one dare not say, 'I am the king,' nor the other boast of her high birth.

'Put your money back, William,' I said, 'and have this drink with me.'

'Thank you,' answered the blind man, very simply, for he had grown accustomed to receiving kindness at the hands of strangers.

'Tell me if a fly drops into the beer, won't you?'

After saying this he raised his voice a little higher to show that he was now addressing the landlord, who was behind the bar and not so

near as I was, saying, 'Do you know what a man told William one day?'

'No, William, I don't,' answered the landlord.

'Well,' continued the blind man, 'he told William that a fly had more than a hundred eyes. Yes, to think that a little fly has all these eyes and a man has only two. Two, mark you, with all this traffic of horses and carts and steam cars, when a man needs as many eyes as a blasted little fly.'

'Yes,' I said, 'even a man that has two sharp eyes has as much as he can do to escape the traffic, what with motor-buses, taxi-cabs and motor-cars.'

'You are right,' agreed the landlord. 'The world's in too great a hurry now with its crazy crowd of money-makers, who have no time to stop at an inn for a little refreshment.'

'Your custom,' I said to the landlord, 'relies principally on horse drivers and pedestrians, but horses are almost a back number now, for they are far too slow for these days.'

'Aye, but we'll be glad of the horses yet,' said the blind man grimly. 'They'll not be too slow for our funerals; there'll be no indecent hurry when that time comes, you can take William's word for that.'

The blind man had no sooner uttered these

words before the door opened suddenly and in walked a customer, a negro this time. Walking up to the bar, the new-comer – a surly-looking fellow – looked at the landlord and then pointed at my glass of beer, intimating that he wanted the same, but never once opened his mouth to speak. When I saw this I was not only surprised but also annoyed, for I knew that this silent stranger would spoil our genial company. When he was served he took a drink where he was standing, and then sat down with the glass still in his hand, close to the blind man's side. The landlord, not liking this strange behaviour, began to make himself busy behind the bar, wiping the shelves and dusting bottles; and I, feeling more annoyed than ever, took a newspaper out of my pocket and began to glance at its contents. But I had scarcely been reading a minute when I was startled by a loud, clear voice, crying, 'Antipathy, William.' Looking up I saw the white, stern face of the blind man, sitting with his body as straight and as immovable as a rock. The negro, as soon as he heard this, looked first at the blind man and then across to me. It was apparent that he did not understand, and now for the first time he began to show a little interest in his company.

'Antipathy, William,' cried the blind man for the second time. After this second cry there was a long silence, so unbearable to me that I began to rustle the paper, to make some noise.

However, I was soon saved any further anxiety, for in a few moments I heard another noise, and looking saw that the blind man was rising to his feet. On this I got up to assist him, and seeing his face turned towards the door, led him in that direction.

'Good-bye, William,' cried the landlord, as the blind man reached the door. The only answer the blind man gave to this was, as soon as one foot was in the street, a third cry, loud, clear and distinct, 'Antipathy, William.'

When I was returning to my seat I saw that the negro had also risen and was placing his empty glass on the bar, just about to leave.

'Landlord,' I said as soon as the negro had gone, – 'Landlord, will you have a drink with me?'

'With pleasure,' he answered, pouring himself out a drop of whisky, which I paid for, and also a second glass of ale for myself.

'What did you think about the blind man's cry of "Antipathy, William"?' I asked.

dropped a penny into his cup he changed his tone at once, and said fervently, "Thank you, kind Christian; God bless you."'

I was not surprised at hearing this story, much less astonished, for I immediately came to the conclusion that I should have done exactly the same under the circumstances. It was remembering my own experience to use I had known white men in that country who could go into a dark room, and if a negro was in it could tell by the smell, even when they could see nothing. And of course a blind man's sense of smell would be ever so much more keen, and his hearing also.

Although I thought that the landlord was probably right that the blind man knew the negro by his smell, yet for all that I still had another idea and said, 'Perhaps it was not so much the smell as the fact that he was sitting side by side with an unfriendly stranger who did not once utter a word. I wonder if it was that that made the blind man's face so weary and distressed.'

'There's something in what you say,' answered the landlord, thoughtfully.

'You seem to know William very well,' I said.

'Yes,' answered the landlord, 'he comes in

The following morning, being Sunday, I went to the service at the cathedral. The preacher, who was an elderly man, big and heavy, preached a very clear and simple sermon with much gloomy astonishment when instead of that being the case, I heard him cursing the world for all he was worth. No one could hear him because of the traffic, so what did it matter? People who saw his lips moving naturally thought he was humbly entreating their charity. But what he was saying was this: "Where are the blasted people gone to? it's half an hour since anything came into the cup. Are they lying in bed dreaming, the lazy swine! If they had lousy blankets they'd soon be walking about, and William would then stand some chance of getting a penny or two. Must William sit here all day without getting anything at all? Why don't some of you stop, you blasted rotters, and put something into William's cup? Are you going to keep him here all day without anything? Oh, you God-forsaken heathens! Curse you all, you herd of swine!"'

'That,' continued the landlord, 'is a fair sample of his language. But as soon as I

dropped a penny into his cup he changed his tone at once, and said fervently, "Thank you, kind Christian; God bless you."'

I was not surprised at hearing this story, much less astonished, for I immediately came to the conclusion that I should have done exactly the same under the circumstances. It was a pleasure and relief to that blind man to use the strongest language he could command, and much more interesting than whining; and as no one heard him, and pitied his lips because they moved, and not for what they said — under these circumstances what did it matter to any but himself?'

Soon after this I wished the landlord good evening and made my way home.

The following morning, being Sunday, I went to the service at the cathedral. The preacher, who was an elderly man, big and heavy, preached a very clear and simple sermon with much eloquence. There was not one flowery sentence in the whole sermon and the preacher had apparently outgrown his joy in pretty fancies. After the service I crossed the road, where there was an open place called College Green. Reaching a seat I sat down near a little girl who was not much more than a baby, and who was then about to toddle after a sparrow, and was scolding him for not allowing himself to be caught. Thinking this a good chance to put down a few thoughts that had been in my mind all the morning I took out my notebook and began to write. There were hundreds of people passing by, for it was near dinner-time and they were making their way home. After writing for a few moments, I looked up, being in a staring study, deep and thoughtful. But I was soon brought back to my surroundings, for in a few moments I became conscious that hundreds of people had me set as an object of interest. Daughters were drawing their

father's attention towards where I sat; mothers were nudging their sons, and lovers were whispering to each other to look. As soon as I became aware of this I put my notebook back in my pocket and went my way, trying to look like an ordinary man.

What surprised me so much at causing all this sensation was that I was not dressed in any way odd, and had neither the long hair of a dreamer nor his wild looks. In fact, as long as I kept walking, people took not the least notice of me. It was the notebook that must have caused all the bother. I wonder why people are so much impressed by the sight of books. One time, when I was living in a cottage in the country, I happened to be walking in the garden when two women were passing the gate. Suddenly one of the women cried in a strange voice of awe, 'Look, he has a book in his hand.' She said this in the same tone she would have used if she had said, 'Look, he has a pistol in his hand.'

At this house where I was now lodging there were, among others, two men that were commercial travellers; one very friendly and talkative, and the other very quiet and reserved. I should not have taken any objection to the latter's reserve, but, unfortunately, his face was often

seen to have unfavourable expressions, which I did not like. These sneering expressions always followed opinions uttered by the other commercial traveller. When this sullen man heard my approval of these opinions, I could see at once by his expression that I had made an enemy of him. The man did not utter a word with the exception of a curt greeting when he came for his meals, during Saturday and Sunday.

But when Monday morning came, I happened to be sitting in the room alone when he entered. To my surprise he said quite cheerfully, 'Good morning,' with a smile that lit up all his face. 'Where's that little tinpot traveller?' he asked. 'What! he to call himself a commercial traveller! It's a man of that kind that disgraces the profession.' When I heard this I could see at once that it was jealousy, and nothing else, that was the cause of this man's sullen humour. If he had not taken a dislike to the other commercial traveller, no doubt he would have been friendly enough. For on this occasion he talked at such a rate it appeared as though he wanted to make up for lost time. His subject was the vicissitudes of a commercial traveller, telling of the good times in the past and the disappointments of the present day. He told, for instance, how he had ten years

ago travelled for a noted soap firm. But this firm changed hands and the new owners discharged the old experienced travellers, who were earning £11 a week each man, and employed in their stead twenty boys at a salary of twenty-five shillings each a week and a small commission. After telling me this the old traveller looked at me for a long time in silence, and then said, 'What has been the consequence?' I waited to hear more, but he stared at me so long that I became somewhat confused.

'I ask you,' he said again in a very solemn voice,—'I ask you, what has been the consequence?'

By this time he had such a hard, stern expression that I began to feel uncomfortable, especially as he was waiting for some kind of an answer, and I did not know what kind to give. However, I managed to say at last, 'I really don't know.'

But he did not appear satisfied at this, and still stared at me in silence without the least sign of giving me any enlightenment.

After this second long pause, in which I felt more confused than ever, because of his hard looks, he said slowly and solemnly, 'Can you think of any one who uses that soap at the present day?'

Sometimes I watch the moon at night,
No matter be she near or far;
Up high, or in a leafy tree
Caught laughing like a bigger star.

To-night the west is full of clouds;
The east is full of stars that fly
Into the cloud's dark foliage,
And the moon will follow by and by.

I see a dark brown shabby cloud —
The moon has gone behind its back;
I looked to see her turn it white —
She turned it to a lovely black.

A lovely cloud, a jet-black cloud;
It shines with such a glorious light,
That I am glad with all my heart
She turned it black instead of white.

On Monday I left Bristol, going by train to Chippenham, from which place I intended to walk to Maidenhead. I reached Chippenham just before noon, and after looking at the town for a while took the road towards Calne, which was only six miles away.

Soon after I left Chippenham, I saw a man

coming towards me who was evidently a beggar; I could soon see that. He must have caught sight of me at the same time, for I could see his hand going into his pocket, and the next moment it was out again. I understood what this meant, for I had often seen such movements made by tramps. In fact, had I not often made such movements myself? He had taken something out of his pocket which he would try to sell to me, or beg on the strength of it. In a few moments he was near enough for me to see what it was—he had a small bunch of bootlaces in his hand.

When this man reached my side he stopped at once and, holding the laces out, said, 'Will you buy a pair of laces to assist a man out of work?'

'I don't want your laces,' I answered, 'but will pay for a pair without taking them.' Saying this I gave him a penny, which he thanked me for, and then put the laces back into his pocket.

'I shouldn't think you made much of a living by selling laces,' I said.

'No,' he answered; 'but I am well satisfied if people treat me in a proper manner. But what annoys me more than anything is the way people waste my time.'

I did not understand this remark, and asked him what he meant by it.

'Well,' he said, 'when I go to a house with my laces people often keep me talking for a long time, and then either being too poor, or thinking I am not deserving of help, they refuse not only free money but also to buy a pair of laces. Now I ask you, as man to man, is that fair and honest? Who's going to pay me for my wasted time? While I am wasting time on them I could be talking to others with more success. But when people will keep detaining me and still refuse either to give for nothing or buy, and even shut the door in my face after I have said, "What about my wasted time, who's going to pay me for that?"—when I get cases of that kind, it puts the very devil in me, as any sensible person will understand.'

'I can well understand your point of view,' I said. 'People should not waste your time in idle talk; if they encourage you to talk, by asking numerous questions, they certainly should pay you for your time, whether they think you are honest or not.'

When he heard this, he nodded approval and said, 'You're a man of understanding, I can see that, and I'm very glad to hear what you say. It's a great pity that others have not

the same kind consideration. They know very well that a man must live *somehow,* and some one must pay him for his time; but when I say to them, "What about my wasted time, who's going to pay me for that?" – when they hear this, they slam their doors in my face. Thank God there are a number of others who pay me at once, without using my time at all.

'Good day and thank you.'

The next moment he was on the move, going towards Chippenham. When this strange traveller had left me I began to weigh his words and they did not appear foolish by any means. For instance, we cannot tell the honest seeker after work from the professional tramp. This spoils our resolution to discourage dishonest men, for we dare not run the risk of refusing a little help to a deserving man. For that reason the real beggar must triumph in our ignorance; it places him in the same position as the ancient mariner, who had a glittering eye that forced people to stand and hear him. And if we do this we are then under a moral obligation to pay him for his time, whether we believe his story or not. If we do not intend to assist him we must not waste his time, but let him go his way.

After I had come to this conclusion I hastened towards Calne. When I arrived at that town I was advised by a man I spoke to, to try the Red House for accommodation. He told me that it was a clean, respectable place, and the charges would be moderate. But when I entered the Red House I soon found that there was no great eagerness to accommodate strangers. For instance, when I applied in the shop, the young woman could not give me an answer as to whether there was accommodation or not, and returned to a back room to consult her mother. After a while she returned and said, 'I can't give you an answer until my sister comes in at half-past six.' It was then six o'clock, so I ordered some tea and was then shown into a back sitting-room. During the tea-time the mother came into my room, from a room still farther back, to have a chat with me, and appeared well satisfied with my company. At last her other daughter came in, and after having a good look at me, said:

'Do you want accommodation for the night?'

'Yes,' I answered, 'if you can manage it.'

I was very pleased with myself for satisfying at last three pairs of suspicious feminine eyes. That they were well satisfied with me in the end was soon made apparent. For when I told

them that I was going out for an hour, and offered to pay for my tea, they had so little suspicion that I would not return that they said, 'No, you can settle in the morning for everything you have had.'

After spending a couple of hours in the public library, I went back to my lodgings and was shown to my room. When I looked out of the window I saw that the moon was nearly full, and a great number of stars were out, and there were also a number of dark clouds coming up from the west. The whole heavens were in motion, and the coming clouds were as dark woods into which the stars like birds were flying. All at once I saw a very shabby-looking cloud, the colour of slate, and it was approaching the moon at a great speed. I could not go to bed until I saw what effect this would have. Of course I did not expect anything wonderful to surprise me: I only thought that the cloud would be made a shade whiter, owing to having the moon behind it. But, instead of this happening, that cloud, to my wonder and surprise, in crossing the moon turned at once into a lovely jet black, shining like a well-groomed horse. I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw this, and was very glad I had not missed it by going to bed at once.

We have no mind to reach that Pole
  Where monarchs keep their icy courts,
Where lords and ladies, proud and cold,
  May do no more than smile at sports ;
Nay, laughing, lying at our ease
We keep our court beneath green trees.

Kings' beds are soft and silvery white,
  While ours are golden straw or hay:
So let kings lie, while gentle sleep
  Attends our harder beds, when they,
Inside their soft white bedclothes, yell
That nightmares ride them down to hell.

Poor lords and ladies, what tame sport
  To hunt a fox or stag, while we
Sit on a green bank in the sun
  And chase for hours a faster flea;
Which blesses us from day to day,
With all our faculties in play.

The cuckoo must be very fond of Wiltshire, for his voice cheered me continually. When I had left Calne on the following morning I heard two of those birds singing like the blacksmith's hammer and tongs, and playing see-saw with their voices.

On this day I had parts of the great open Downs to cross. They were not unfamiliar to me, for I had travelled this road from Calne to Marlborough in my real tramp days, some years before. It was winter at that time, and I was crossing a wild part of the Downs, when it was dark, although it was not yet seven o'clock. I had not met any one for a long time and began to think I was the only traveller for miles around. But all at once I saw a human form in the distance, and, to my surprise, soon recognized that the traveller was a woman. Seeing that she had a large basket on her arm, I judged her to be a pedlar. Thinking this woman would be nervous at meeting a strange man in such a lonely place in the dark, I stepped aside a good way, so as to give her plenty of room to pass. However, she was far from being nervous, for she stopped at once and asked me if I had a match.

'Yes,' I said, stepping forward and offering her my box of matches. But, instead of taking them, she said, 'Will you strike a light when I hold my shawl out?' Saying this she placed her basket on the ground and then spread her shawl against the wind. So we both bent our faces behind the shawl and lighted our pipes. My pipe was made of wood, but she being a

truer traveller, was smoking a very short black pipe of clay—a very nose-warmer. After that we wished each other good night, she being as cool and self-possessed as though it were broad day and a hundred people were within easy call. I remembered the incident now, as I crossed the Downs, a literary tramp, on this bright morning in May.

On this particular day I met one of the dirtiest fellows I had ever seen in my life. I had been resting for a while, and as I was about to continue my journey I looked back and saw this man in the distance, coming towards me. Seeing that he was going my way I settled down again to wait for him, watching his movements as he came along. I noticed at once that he was walking at a fast pace, but what surprised me was that he often came to a halt and made his hands feel various parts of his clothes. My first impression was that he had lost something and was searching for it. I saw him halt quite a number of times and make these quick movements, feeling down both his legs, then in his bosom, and sometimes up both his sleeves.

'The poor fellow is in a terrible state of worry,' thought I. 'Perhaps he has lost silver, or even gold, which he has been saving up. Such

a loss is almost madness to a poor man like that.'

However, these were only my first thoughts, for I soon came to the conclusion that the man was scratching himself owing to an attack of fleas.

When he had reached my side I saw at once that he was inclined to pass without saying a word, but I brought him to a halt by inquiring his destination for the day. He did not answer for some time, for he had put his right hand down the back of his neck to scratch his shoulder blade, and this action choked his utterance. However, after a time, he answered that he was on his way to Marlborough.

'Let's walk together a little way,' I said, 'for I am going there too, but I am not able to walk very fast.'

With these words I gave him twopence, knowing that he would be in no great hurry now, as he would hope for further kindness before we parted for good. To encourage him in this belief I offered him tobacco, at the same time saying, 'I shall be glad when we come to an inn.'

After doing and saying this I knew my trouble would not be to keep his company, but to get rid of him at last. He began to scratch

more than ever now, as much from delight as from fleas.

This stranger was a man of about forty-five years of age, tall and lean. He had a black bushy beard that did not hang, but stuck out, and his hair was just long enough to hang over the collar of his coat. His clothes were not only torn, but ill fitting too. In fact, there were so many holes in his clothes that I really don't know how he could have got back into them again if he had once got out of them. He had no heels to his boots and the laces were common string.

'Are you out of work?' I asked as we went along.

'I am,' he answered. 'There's no work to be had anywhere – curse it.'

Saying this he began to scratch his left shoulder, and I knew at once that it was a flea and not the lack of work that was the object of his curse. 'Have you been out of work long?' I inquired.

'Two months,' he answered. 'And I never expect to find work again – curse it.'

This time he began to scratch his left thigh, and I again came to the conclusion that a flea and not the lack of work was the reason why he swore. Of course I could see plainly that this

man was a tramp of a very long standing, who did not trouble much about work, but would not let me know the truth.

We went on like this for about half a mile, talking of the difficulties of a man out of work, which my ragged companion said were 'heartbreaking.'

'Yes,' he said, coming to a halt and beginning to scratch under his right arm. 'Yes, this kind of life is heartbreaking – curse it!'

At last I saw a signboard not far away and I knew that we were coming to an inn. But by this time I began to have my doubts as to the wisdom of having this man's company in even the very lowest kind of tavern, where the landlord or his customers would be certain to give him a cold reception, if any. Again, I wanted to get something to eat there, and had the chance of being treated well if I went alone. But they certainly would not invite me into a clean parlour in such company, I felt sure of that. However, I did not like to let him go without first giving him a glass of ale. So I came to a stand and said, 'We will go into this inn and have some bread and cheese and ale, but while we are there can you stop scratching?'

'Of course I can,' he answered readily, as though nothing in the world was easier.

'You must understand,' I continued, 'that the landlord, or his wife, or his daughter, which ever serves us, would not care to have a customer that kept on scratching himself. So drink, eat and laugh, but for God's sake don't scratch.'

When my ragged companion heard this he laughed heartily and began to scratch himself all over. And when I saw his delight I could not help laughing as heartily myself. However, after his glee was over, I said kindly, so as not to hurt his feelings, 'You'll try not to scratch, won't you?'

When I had done speaking, my companion, who had been motionless for quite half a minute, said in low, determined tones, 'If I *say* I won't scratch, I *won't* scratch. And if I do, may the devil pickle and purge me.' With this understanding we made our way towards the inn. But we had scarcely gone ten steps when my companion waved his hand with a wide sweep, saying, 'That's a wonderful sight, isn't it?'

When I heard this I at once had a suspicion that something was wrong. So, although I looked away from him for a moment, I turned quickly in his direction, and was just in time to surprise him in the act of scratching under the left arm. Seeing this I immediately made

up my mind to enter the inn alone. So I came to a stand and, taking three pennies out of my pocket, said, 'Do what you like now, for I will probably be at this inn for a couple of hours. Good-bye.'

'Thank you,' he answered, grasping my hand. 'If there was ever a gentleman, you are one; so I wish you good-bye and good luck.' Saying this, he went off with all speed.

I walked very slowly now, for we were near the inn, and I felt sure that my late companion would go there for a drink. When he got in front of it he stood in the road for a little time, then appeared suddenly to make up his mind to have a drink. So, giving one backward glance to see how far I was behind, he then made a sudden dart and almost ran into the inn. Of course I had done with him now, and although it was not long before I followed him, it was not likely that we would speak to each other again.

As I entered the inn, which was called the *Waggon and Horses,* I saw my late companion sitting in the taproom, with a glass of ale in his hand. Whether the landlady had been kind to him or not, I cannot say, but it was most certain that when I entered she cast several cold glances at her other customer. However,

the latter took little heed of this and sat with his two elbows leaning on the table. It must not be inferred from this attitude that he was not scratching himself. For there he sat, his arms motionless it is true, but what of his feet? If the landlady, who had now retired, could have seen those feet as they were seen by me, she would have ordered him out of her house at once. For there he sat, resting on one leg at a time, while the foot of the other leg was kept busy scratching. But this secret method was not satisfying for long, for in a few moments he had his hands to work on the upper part of his body. After doing this for a short time, he suddenly sprang to his feet, finished drinking his ale, and ran out of the house as he had run into it.

After I had had some bread and cheese and pickles, a couple of glasses of ale, and a rest for half an hour, I left the *Waggon and Horses* and continued my journey towards Marlborough. But I had not been walking more than twenty minutes when I heard a voice hail me from behind a steep bank.

'Wait a moment,' the voice cried, 'for I am now ready to travel again.'

'Have you been sleeping?' I asked, when my late companion reached my side.

'No,' he answered with a laugh. 'I've been having a lively time hunting and killing fleas. I shall sleep well after such sport as that.'

'Your body's in a wretched state, my friend,' I said.

'I know it is, mate,' he answered, shaking his head despondently. 'We poor beggars are devoured by lice, but when we are dead we'll be devoured by worms, like kings and prime ministers. I know my body's in a bad state, mate; but when I think of the worms of death it makes me happy to know that I still live—although I am lousy.'

As we walked along he talked of nothing but hunting and killing fleas, saying that hunting hares, foxes or stags was but poor sport compared with that. The subject seemed to interest him so much that he could not change to any other, and was still at it when we were within a short distance of a village.

'Now,' I said, coming to a halt, 'now we must part for good. Here are a couple more pennies and I wish you every success.'

'Thank you,' he answered, 'the same success to you. If there ever was a gentleman, you are one.'

Saying this, he went on, while I followed slowly behind.

When I had left Calne on this day I was in

excellent spirits, knowing that I was sure of good lodgings when I reached Marlborough. For I had met a young fellow the evening before who lodged at Marlborough, and had been sent for that day to Calne to do some work on the telephones. He was so open and friendly in his conversation that I soon told him something of my own affairs, and mentioned that I was likely to have difficulty in getting lodgings when I reached Marlborough.

On hearing that I was going to that little town on the following day, he gave me his address, saying that the landlady had an extra bedroom and would make me comfortable for the night. This confidence accounted for my excellent spirits on the way.

When I reached the Town Hall I inquired for St. Martin's. Going in that direction I again inquired, mentioning the landlady's name, and was told that she lived near an inn called the *Queen's Head*. It was not long before I was there and, after having had a late tea and being shown my room, I considered myself lucky at having secured such a quiet, clean and homely place. I felt that if I could have got such a comfortable end to my journey every day, I could have gone on roaming to the end of my life – I mean all my spring and summer days.

When I left Marlborough on the following morning I was struck by seeing so many donkeys, all driven by the better classes, and came to the conclusion that the donkey was held in great favour in that part of the world and had a good time of it. For when leaving that town I heard a noise behind me like a fast-travelling motor-car, and turned my head at once to make sure I was not in danger. When I did so, I saw to my astonishment that it was only a donkey and trap, driven by a young lady. I never thought it possible that a donkey could travel at such a rate, for he was out of sight in a very short time.

Not long before this I had seen a man coming out of an inn, where his donkey and trap were waiting for him. I suppose the man must have had a drop too much, for in stepping into the trap his foot slipped and he fell on the road. The donkey, thinking his master was safe in the trap, began to go, but was soon stopped by a man who had seen what had happened.

'The wrong one was in the shafts,' I said to a man who was standing by. The man looked at me, but said nothing, neither did he smile.

Perhaps he saw the joke when he had considered a while. I hope so, for I was quite pleased with myself at having made it.

How deadly and mysterious those yew trees look! Just before I reached Savernake forest I passed a large clump of them, when the sun was for a moment clouded. Perhaps it was the momentary darkness and the loneliness of the place that affected me; for I looked both up and down the road, but could see no sign of any life at all.

How strange is this: I cannot pass this wood
But what its leaves, of such a dark brown green,
Seem closely knit to hide a deed of blood;
And look as deadly as these curtains seen
In quiet houses, where dark Rumour saith
Drugged wine is, sudden blows and hidden death.

However, when I entered the forest, the sun was out again, and I soon recovered my good humour. There were very few large trees with branches over the road, so that my walk was sunny all the way. I could not help thinking what a lucky road the Bath road was, that it had over two miles of its length in a beautiful forest with so many green, open spaces, and with such a variety of colour in the bark and leaves of the different trees.

After I had been in the forest for a little while I was suddenly hailed by a voice at the side of the road. On turning round I saw a man lying in the grass, who was just in the act of sitting up.

'Have you a pipeful of tobacco?' he asked.

'Certainly,' I said, going towards him and offering him my pouch to help himself.

'How far are you going?' he inquired as he filled his pipe.

'As far as Hungerford to-day,' I answered. 'But it looks very much like rain, and I fear to get a good wetting before I reach there.'

'Yes,' said the stranger, in a disgusted voice. 'Yes, it's sultry enough for rain, but we won't get any until this damned wind goes down. I wish to God the flies would bite, but they don't in spite of the heat.'

When I heard this I looked at the man with some surprise, not having the least idea of what his words meant, and for that reason not knowing what to say. However, I assured him that the flies *did* bite, and that they had been trying all the morning to bathe in the sweat of my neck and forehead.

'I am very glad to hear that,' cried the stranger, in a more cheerful voice, 'for that's a sign of rain.'

'Yes,' I answered. 'We want rain badly, or there will be a very poor prospect of getting green vegetables in the summer, or fruit either.'

'Oh! to hell with green vegetables,' exclaimed the stranger in an irritated voice. 'There are more important things than that. If it doesn't rain soon, it means that I, for one, cannot make a living.'

When I heard this I was more surprised than ever and did not know how to continue the conversation.

In a few moments he continued, saying, 'People are getting stingy and are hoarding their money; they don't prepare for a rainy day.'

'Surely,' I began, 'if people are saving their money, they must be preparing for a rainy day. What else are they doing?'

'Good Lord! how dull you are!' exclaimed the stranger testily. 'Can't you see what I am; and if people won't spend their money and prepare for a rainy day, how in the hell am I to make a living?'

Saying this, he cast his eyes some few feet away, and it was then I saw for the first time a couple of old umbrellas, which he had probably thrown from him in disgust. The stranger was an umbrella mender, or, as he is

known on the road, a 'mush fakir.' No wonder he was anxious that people should prepare for a rainy day, by spending their money on umbrellas instead of saving it. Before I left him I gave him twopence, which he appeared to be very glad of.

I could not help laughing as I went along at the way in which the stranger had spoken of preparing for a rainy day, which was quite natural to a man in his trade. To other men the flies were a pest, but they could bite this man and be blessed for doing so. Other men would curse them as they drove them away; but when this man drove them away he gave them kind words and invited them to come again and often.

When I reached a small village about two miles from Hungerford I crossed the border line from Wiltshire into Berkshire. There was a small inn at this village, called the *Pelican,* at which I had a pint of ale. I had been warned that there would be no other inn between Marlborough and it, a distance of eight miles. If there is any news I detest, it is to be told that a country road has no inn for several miles — few and far between. I confess I like to see the inns, even if I do not use them. As I passed through this first little village in Berkshire I

could not help being struck by its peaceful looks. There was the little church on the hill, and a small green common at the side of the road. On this green common a donkey was making an ass of himself by rolling about on his back and kicking at the clouds.

I saw several happy-looking old villagers standing at their cottage doors and smoking their pipes. There was no sign of miserable poverty here, and yet I had been told that few of the farm labourers in these parts earned more than fourteen shillings a week. However, they had their gardens and could grow their own vegetables, and the rent of a cottage was only two or three shillings a week. Under these circumstances they were more comfortable than hundreds and thousands of workers in our large industrial towns, who cannot do as well with twice that amount in wages. When I saw these happy-looking old villagers at their cottage doors, I could see that the Old Age pensions had not only made them independent, but had actually made their lives a help to their families. For a country house-wife can make a shilling go a long way indeed.

I had not seen any tramps for more than an hour, and began to wonder where they had all gone to. It must be remembered that I was

on the main road from east to west, on which tramps are often met. However, I soon found one who was lying on the grass at the side of the road. I had not noticed him until I had almost reached him. On coming close I saw that he was a very shabby-looking fellow indeed. Although he was now sitting up, I don't believe he was yet aware of my coming. I judged that he had been asleep, for he was now stretching his body and yawning. The way this man yawned frightened me, for he kept his mouth open so long and at such a size that I was afraid something would happen.

I had been told when a boy of a certain man who yawned to such an extent that his mouth refused to close again; and he had to get out of bed at midnight and go in search of a doctor. And now, every time I open my own mouth to yawn, or see others do it, I have a vision of that unfortunate man, and am afraid of the consequence. However, I thoroughly enjoy sneezing, for it never occurs to my mind that I could break a blood-vessel with doing so. Although I am not a religious man, yet for all that I cannot help crying sincerely at the end of a good sneeze, 'God bless us all.' So every time I sneeze it seems to me like Christmas with the whole world.

This man appeared surprised to see me so near him, but soon recovered his wits and, as I had expected, began to beg, asking for a penny to help him on his way. Now, when I had first started on my travels, I had made up my mind to refuse no beggar a penny, and all he had to do was to ask for it. For that reason I gave one to this man, at the same time telling him that many men had begged of me and that I could not afford to give to all.

'Of course not,' said the shabby stranger; 'they are not all deserving, and you cannot tell which of them are.'

'Which way are you going?' I asked, determined to have a few jokes with this man, and make him confess he was a professional beggar.

'To Hungerford,' he answered, with a laugh.

'Why do you laugh?' I inquired with some surprise.

'Because Hungerford is well named,' he answered, 'and I am certain to go hungry in that town.'

'Well, come along,' I said. 'The price of your bed will be fourpence, and I promise to give you that before we get there. I know for certain that you have not been idle all day, and the few pennies you already have will do for food. When I was on tramp, a few years ago,

I always had the price of my bed and a penny or two over by this time of the day.'

When my shabby companion heard this he began to eye me critically, not knowing what to say.

'You don't mean to say,' he said at last, 'that you have been a real tramp?'

'I have been a real tramp for the best part of my life,' I answered shortly—'and a good one too. One that could get the price of his feather (bed) and a pocketful of scrand (food), not to mention a little skimish (drink), in any place that had people living in it. I used to do so well that I could often afford to take the rattler (train). You ought to be proud of calling yourself a beggar,' I continued—'that is, of course, if you are any good at all at the game.'

When he heard this the shabby stranger was at a loss for words, not knowing whether to take me seriously or not.

'The little work I have done for others,' I continued, 'was done in my early manhood, when I had little sense and was too timid to beg. But even then I could not work more than a week without claiming my freedom.'

Although this was the truth, yet for all that it sounded false to even my own ears. Perhaps the reason of this was that I could not openly

utter this truth except under certain conditions, and although it was old in thought it was new in speech.

I could see that my new companion was confused and did not care to hazard any remark. However, after we had walked in silence for some time, he began to think some comment on my words was due.

'But you are not a tramp now; how is that?' he asked.

'The reason is very simple,' I answered. 'Some time ago I had a small legacy left to me, and it is just enough to keep me from begging and in idleness.'

He made no answer to this, and I could see he was still puzzled as to what kind of man he had met.

Now some time before this I had written a paper in defence of beggars, which a friend had read to a small gathering of people interested in social matters. It was quite a foolish thing, meant to create amusement, and not serious thought. Although the paper had been destroyed, I still remembered two or three points used to prove that the beggar was the dew, and not the blight, on civilization. So, although I could hardly keep from laughing, I said at last, 'You ought to be proud of being

a beggar; the beggar is the most religious man in the world, for there is no other man that more truly keeps the ten commandments. He not only does no labour on the seventh day, but he also keeps holy the other six. He never bears false witness against his neighbour, for the simple reason that he is a simple traveller and has no neighbours. He never steals – that is if he is a good beggar. He never covets any other man's goods, because he hates to be tied to any property at all. He is the only wise man, because he is not greedy to own houses or land. He is not vain of his personal appearance, and when he leaves a house where he has begged he never leaves behind him suspicion and jealousy between a man and his wife. People tell a beggar to go to work, but as you know yourself he does very fine work as it is; he works on their best feelings, and there is no nobler work in all the world than that.'

While I was saying these things my companion laughed once or twice and was as puzzled as ever.

'You're very funny,' he said at last, 'and I don't know what you really mean.'

'What I mean,' I answered, 'is this: I believe you are a true traveller as I have been, and I want you to say so.'

'If I said I was not looking for work you wouldn't give me the price of my bed,' he said cautiously.

'Here's the price of your bed,' I answered, counting four pennies into his hand. 'Now tell me the truth: are you a true traveller or not?'

'You are right, I am,' he said, as soon as he had made sure of the four pennies.

'But,' I asked, 'doesn't it trouble your conscience a little when you go begging at the houses of very poor people that have little for themselves? That was the only thing that used to trouble me when I was on the road; otherwise, the life was not too unpleasant.'

My companion looked at me, but made no answer. I could see that he was touched by this reminder of the kindness he had received daily from poor workers that were hardly any better off than tramps.

We were now within a mile of Hungerford and, knowing that I had to find respectable lodgings, while my companion was going to a common lodging-house – knowing this, I thought we ought to part at once. So I sat down at the side of the road, telling him that I was in no hurry to reach Hungerford and would rest awhile. Hearing this, he thanked me for my kindness and hurried off. No doubt he

wanted to do some begging in the town before he settled for the night.

When I at last reached Hungerford I was almost afraid I would have to take train to Newbury, owing to the difficulty of finding lodgings. I had tried three coffee houses and six inns, but all without success. However, at the last inn the landlord, who had no room of his own, recommended me to a private house close by, kept by an old widow. So I went there and was accepted as a lodger for the night.

THERE was no public library at Hungerford, nor any kind of amusement on that particular night, so that there was nothing else to do than to spend the evening at an inn. So, after settling for my lodgings, I walked down the town again and entered the parlour of the *John of Gaunt*. Several of the townspeople were there when I entered, but they did not appear at all curious at the sight of a stranger. Indeed, they not only continued their subject – which was corns on the feet – but invited me with their friendly eyes to join in the conversation. One man swore that on a certain Tuesday night he had to walk in his bare feet, boots in hand, two miles to his home. But he carried in his pocket a remedy that in twelve hours tore the corn out by the roots, and that he put on his boots the following morning and leapt a five-barred gate.

But I was so sick and melancholy at the difficulty I had had in getting lodgings, that, in spite of their friendly eyes, I could not, to save my life, utter a single idea on the subject of corns. However, I sat there silent until nine o'clock, and then returned to my lodgings.

When I had entered the little house the last thing before going to bed, I saw a small boy sitting at a table who was reading a half-penny novel. He was so interested in what he was reading that he did not even look up when I entered, and I am doubtful whether he heard me at all. The old woman, who was the boy's grandmother, had told me that I need not hurry to go to bed, and that I could sit and smoke for a while. So I made myself comfortable in an armchair and began a conversation with the boy, for his grandmother had now left the room. But it was of no use, for the boy only answered 'yes' and 'no,' and I had to give up in despair. He was reading a story called the 'Indian Kid,' and his eyes were riveted on the page. Failing to attract his notice, I waited until the old woman had returned, and then told her I would go to bed. Hearing this, she lit a candle and started for the stairs, telling me to follow. When we reached the room, I noticed at once, to my annoyance that it contained two beds. I began to wonder who the other lodger was, and had visions of a drunken navvy disturbing me all night with his snores. However, I did not say anything, but wished the old woman good night, undressed, and got into bed.

I had not been in bed more than ten minutes when the other lodger appeared, and I saw with much relief that it was the boy. He had taken his boots, stockings, coat and waistcoat off downstairs, and all he had to do now was to take off his trousers. He did this with such speed that it seemed no more than second before he was lying on his side, reading his half-penny novel by the light of his candle. I suppose he must have been near the end of the story, for it was not long before he threw the paper on the floor and blew out the light.

'Reading about Indians?' I asked.

'Yes,' he answered slowly, as though he wanted to either think or sleep.

'I have seen thousands of them,' I said quietly .

These words were no sooner out of my mouth than there was a loud cry, followed by a lively motion in the bed. The next instant the boy was sitting bolt upright, trying to see what kind of man was at hand.

'What!' he cried. 'You've seen Indians? Hoop la.'

'Thousands of them,' I said calmly, 'and not in a show either.'

'How many did you kill?' he cried, in an excited voice.

'None,' I answered slowly, being sorry now that I had ever said a word about Indians.

'Then how did you save your scalp if you didn't kill them? But perhaps you haven't got a scalp, have you?'

To this question I made no answer.

'Were you a cowboy?' he began again, after a breathless pause. 'Did you meet the Indians on the prairie or on the Rocky Mountains? Were you tracked? Do you really mean to tell me that you have seen Indians? How can I get to America – tell me that? Hoop la! Oh! don't go to sleep yet.'

Not succeeding in getting any answer to these questions, the boy, thinking I was gone to sleep, prepared very reluctantly to do the same, but not before he had waited patiently, sitting up in bed for a long time. But at last he lay down, saying in a voice of disappointment, 'He's gone to sleep, and he has seen Indians.'

No doubt this boy felt a great pride in sleeping in the same room as a man who had seen Indians, and was sorry now that he had not been more friendly earlier in the evening.

Before I went to sleep I could not help thinking of my own life when I was about the same age as that boy. At that time I was reading all the great classics, although I could not under-

stand them. Strange to say, my blood-and-thunder age, when I read about highwaymen, Indians and scouts, came later, when I was a young man. Yes, when I was between thirteen and fourteen I wanted to be a man of great literary genius; but when I was between seventeen and eighteen my ambition was to rob the rich by force and kill Indians for sport.

Thinking of this strange boy, who was now sharing the room with me, brought to my mind my own ambition at his age, and what I did to show it. I had been looking through a book that contained the pictures of men of genius, and had been struck by the size of their foreheads. It never occurred to me for one moment that it was the baldness of age that made their foreheads clean and bare from their eyebrows to the backs of their heads. After admiring these large foreheads for a long time, I decided on two points: firstly, that I also was intellectual; secondly, that I did not *look* intellectual. So that very night I took possession of my grandmother's scissors and my grandfather's razor and went to bed early. On reaching my room, and placing the candle near the looking-glass, I began to cut my hair about an inch back from the forehead. When this was done I used the razor to cut the bristles, and often

had to pause because of the great pain. However, in spite of all I could do, I could not get that inch of scalp as smooth and white as my forehead. It still remained dark, and I knew that the morning's light would make it appear darker still. But the worst was yet to come, for it was not long before the top of my forehead was dotted with small pools of blood. In fact, I went through a great deal of pain in trying to enlarge my forehead at the expense of my head, and went to bed at last in utter discomfiture, knowing that I had failed. When I looked in the glass the next morning I almost sank for shame. I had not been seated at the breakfast table more than three minutes before my grandmother cried in astonishment and alarm:

'William Henry, what in the earth is the matter with your forehead?'

'Nothing,' I answered stoutly.

'Nothing,' my grandmother reiterated, making sure that her glasses were really on her nose and properly adjusted, — 'Nothing indeed! Look, Francis!'

On hearing this, my grandfather looked at me across the table and then said gruffly, 'Keep him in and send the maid for the doctor.' To my relief no more was said.

When I had said that nothing was the matter with me, both my grandmother and my grandfather came to the conclusion that I had caught some kind of skin disease, and not only did not feel it but did not even know it was to be seen. This was proved almost immediately, for after my grandmother had taken another long look, she said severely, 'You've been playing with Tony Lewis!'

Tony Lewis was a poor, dirty, ragged boy that was neglected, and for that reason was supposed to have a good many diseases. His mother was a widow with several other children, who had to go out working hard from morning till night. She had as much as she could do to earn her children enough food, without a question of studying their personal appearance. All respectable boys were warned not to play with Tony Lewis. However, when we respectable boys were arrested, tried, convicted and birched for stealing, nothing could be proved against Tony Lewis, although his house was searched by the police. So the poor widow had the satisfaction of knowing that her poor, ragged, lousy little son was not to be despised after all.

When the doctor came I had made my escape. So, after he had had the symptoms

described to him, and Tony Lewis also described, he sent a bottle of medicine, also a bottle of ointment to be rubbed into the scalp.

I had such a good clean bed at the old widow's house at Hungerford, and the charge was so moderate, that when I left I gave her sixpence extra for her cleanliness.

The next morning I got up early, and after having had a good breakfast at the old widow's, I was on my way to Newbury just after eight o'clock. The air was fresh and I wanted to take advantage of the hours before noon. After all, a man walks with his heart as well as his legs, and I knew that my legs would not be heavy as long as my heart remained cheerful and light.

When I was well on my way, being some four or five miles from Hungerford, I met a big, stout man with a very red face, whom I judged to be a farmer.

'Good morning,' said this man, coming to a halt.

'Good morning,' I nodded, standing to hear what he had to say.

'Have you come far on this road?' he asked.

'From Hungerford,' I answered, 'where I stayed overnight.'

'I suppose you didn't see eight cows in your travels?' he inquired.

This question took me by surprise, because of the exact number. I had certainly seen cows in different places, perhaps I had seen seven

together, or, nearer still, seven cows and a calf. However, I could not say for certain that I had seen exactly eight cows together, so I made no immediate answer.

'Because,' continued the farmer, 'this morning I had eight cows in a meadow, but they have gone astray now, and I can find no trace of them.'

I was so interested in this matter that, when I left him, I not only kept a look-out for eight cows, but also mentioned the case to other farmers that happened to come my way. But these men plied me with so many questions as to the farmer's name, what he looked like, and the exact spot where I had met him, that I began to think it would be wise to say no more, for it struck me very forcibly that they were only inquisitive and had no real sympathy in the trouble and worry of their fellow-man. All they wanted was a subject for gossip, and I was determined to gratify no more of them. So when I came to a village and entered an inn and saw two men that appeared to be workers on a farm, I said nothing about eight cows that had gone astray and were expected to be found like one.

As a rule the farmer's subjects for conversation are the weather, the crops and the cattle,

as we know. But it is not fair to say that farmers are not interested in other matters. For instance, if these two men had only known that I had been a traveller in other parts of the world, they would have listened with great pleasure as long as I cared to talk. Even the towns and counties of our own land would have been of great interest to them, without a question of that fascination attached to foreign states. However, I did not want to talk about my own affairs, so I ordered a glass of beer and then took up a paper to read. The two farmers eyed me suspiciously for a moment or two, and then, thinking I was deeply interested in the paper, took no more notice of me, and continued their conversaton. One of them, the elder of the two, said in an impressive voice:

'There's never a day goes by but what either the missus or myself gives the lad this advice: "Whatever you do, my lad, on no account sign any papers or documents, or you will be sorry for it."'

I was very much amused at hearing this, for the innocent couple overlooked so many things. Of course no important business could be done without signatures. Again, they overlooked the fact that the boy was under age and that his name would not be wanted at all. I came to

the conclusion that the father had, at one time, signed a document that he could not read, or which had been misinterpreted to him. He had then signed away more than he intended to, which he had been sorry for ever since.

After the old farmer had been talking on this subject for some time, his companion suddenly introduced the name of a neighbour called Brown. For a few moments he talked of Brown's soil and cattle and then said, 'What do you think of his girl Jane?'

It must be remembered that these two men were well on in years, and no doubt were fathers. For that reason, when the youngest of the two asked his companion what he thought of Jane, the other at once came to the conclusion that she had done something unusual, and said, 'What's Jane been doing, then?'

If they had been two young bachelors instead of fathers, no doubt the question, 'What d'you think of Jane?' would have been answered, 'She's a fine girl,' or something less favourable.

But with these old men it was a question of manners and conduct and not personal looks.

'Well, as you know,' continued the first speaker, 'Jane's a fine-looking girl, although she's only sixteen; but she has some very high notions of herself.'

Saying this, the speaker began to puff hard at his pipe. His companion waited for a moment or two and then, seeing the other in no hurry to continue, asked with a little impatience for the second time, 'What's Jane been doing then?'

'Doing!' repeated the other; 'why, making an ass of herself; that's what she's been doing.'

'Who told you? I don't believe it,' answered the other stoutly. 'Jane is more like a lady than any other farmer's daughter I know.'

'Perhaps she is,' agreed the first speaker, 'but I'll tell you what has happened. Some time ago Jane took some very high notions into her head, and wanted her father to pay for dancing lessons for her. She said that she would never be able to walk with grace until she learnt the way to dance.'

'She did, did she?' interrupted the other farmer. 'Why, there's not another farmer's daughter round here that walks better than Jane, I swear.'

The first speaker took no notice of this interruption and continued:

'When Brown heard this he was quite upset, although he idolizes the girl. He told her to get rid of such crazy ideas, for there was a heavy mortgage on the farm. So Jane said no

more about dancing, for she knew things didn't prosper with her father as they should. But she used to burn so much candle at night that Brown and his missus began to be afraid of fire.

'"You mustn't read in bed, Jane," said her father, "or there'll be a fire."

'"Yes," said Brown's missus, — "yes, you are burning too much candle, Jane, and you know we can't afford it."

'But Jane still went on burning candle, in spite of what her father and mother had said. Now what do you think the young hussy was doing at night, after all the others had gone to bed?'

'Reading silly novels, I suppose,' answered the other. 'I don't know what else she could be doing.'

'No,' said the first speaker, — 'no, Jane was doing nothing of the kind. What she was doing was this. She put her candle down and, after taking off her boots, walked up and down the room, looking at her shadow all the time.'

'What did she do that for?' asked the other farmer in a puzzled voice.

'Well,' continued his companion, 'the silly girl told her mother that she would teach herself to walk with grace by studying her own shadow on the wall.'

'I never heard such nonsense before,' cried the other farmer, 'and I can now see that Jane has too many high notions for a farmer's daughter.'

After this they both drank their beer and went out together. The next moment I followed their example, for there was nothing else of interest to detain me. Moreover, I had still a long way to go before I reached Newbury.

The idea of Jane's shadow took a strong hold on my imagination, and I could not help thinking of that handsome, simple country girl as she walked her room at night, posing with her fine young body in different shapes. It was something to dream of, for the eye could never hope to see such movements in real life. It also brought to mind the vanity of a very charming girl I used to know in my youth. One night when there was so bad a thunder-storm that the girl's mother went down into the cellar for fear, her daughter, who wore false hair because her own was thin and weak, left her bed from another kind of fear. For, after the storm was over and her mother had returned to her bedroom, she found her daughter lying in bed with all her false hair on.

'Were you afraid of the thunder?' asked the mother.

'Yes,' answered the daughter. 'I didn't want to be struck dead and found here baldheaded.'

At last I arrived at Newbury, where I stayed overnight at a dairy on the Bath road. This dairy used to be an old coaching house called the *Bear,* famous for its cockpit, until it was closed owing to a murder. Either the mistress had thrown her maidservant down the stairs, and killed her, or the latter had done that for her mistress. Whichever it was, the house was closed after the murder, and it was never again opened as the *Bear.* I had to go up the beautiful old staircase where the murder was done to reach my bed. The extraordinary thing about this house was that it looked quite new from the outside, and no one would ever dream that it was full of the most burning history.

No idle gold – since this fine sun, my friend,
Is no mean miser, but doth freely spend.

No precious stones – since these green mornings show
Without a charge, their pearls where'er I go.

No lifeless books – since birds with their sweet tongues
Will read aloud to me their happier songs.

No painted scenes – since clouds can change my skies
A hundred times a day to please my eyes.

No headstrong wine – since while I drink the spring
Into my eager ears will softly sing.

No surplus clothes – since every simple beast
Can teach me to be happy with the least.

I COULD not help thinking on this fine morning how little is required to make a man happy. A small income, just enough to give a man his liberty, an eye for beauty, an ear for sweet sounds – with these a man is capable of enjoying life to the full.

I was rather disappointed to learn that Reading was over seventeen miles from Newbury, seeing that I had let the morning advance towards noon before I had made a start. However, there was no great hurry, for time was my own. When I reached Thatcham I was in that delightful state which must be called the bread and cheese state. That is, I felt such a healthy hunger that bread and cheese and ale would be a luxury. So I went into the *Wheat Sheaf* and satisfied my appetite in that way.

I was very much amused when I was clear of that village to be followed for a quarter of an hour by several peewits, that flew close to me, screaming into my ears. They must have had eggs somewhere in the neighbourhood, and were determined to see me away beyond the danger of stealing them. After they had followed me for about a quarter of an hour they turned back, so as to follow another man that was going the other way.

Tramps were fairly numerous on this road, and as fast as one passed me I could see another in the distance. Others were sitting down at the roadside, and not many allowed me to pass without asking for some kind of assistance. In fact, it was only by changing silver at every opportunity I had that I could keep sufficient

coppers in hand. One tramp, a woman, who had a little child with her, deliberately caught me by the shoulder and held me fast, saying: 'You have a kind face, and God bless you for it. Now show that you have a kind heart and be a father to this poor child.'

'Where is the child's father now?' I asked.

'I don't know; he has left me,' answered the woman. 'But this child is the very image of him.'

Saying this, she kissed and hugged the child because he was like his villain of a father.

Not long after this, when I was sitting on a green bank, I was overtaken by a woman in shabby black, who was on her way towards Reading. When she reached my side I was not at all surprised when she began to greet me with the utmost familiarity and to beg of me. Women are much finer beggars than men. In the first place they are much better talkers, and in the second place they have more confidence, knowing that the police are not likely to do any more than warn them. Being aware of this, I knew that this woman would not pass on until she had told me quite a number of things, interesting or not. Although my clothes were not very fine, yet this woman had me judged at a glance.

'Are you tramping for pleasure?' she asked.

'Yes,' I answered, 'I am going to Reading; and you?'

'I'm going there too,' she said, 'and I know you will give me a penny to buy a cup of tea.'

'Certainly,' I said, 'here it is. Where did you sleep last night?'

Now, strangely enough, this question was the very one she wanted, for, before I could say another word, she waved her hands wildly towards Newbury and screamed, 'Where did I sleep? In the workhouse and don't I remember it!'

Saying this, she began to beat her two hands together, and then with a quick movement threw herself on the grass at my side. She had found some one interested in her story, and in spite of my confusion I knew it was no good to try to escape from her until she had all her say. Knowing this, I sat and listened, and was soon laughing until my jaws ached. Every now and then she, between her curses, joined in the laughter, which was at the expense of the workhouse she had left that morning. She, it seems, had quarrelled with one of the officials, and if she had abused him in the same language she repeated to me, I felt sure that he would never forget it. For more than twenty minutes

she sat at my side, using worse language than I had ever heard from a woman's lips. The novelty of my position was too much for me, and I laughed myself into pain. At last she said, 'I must be on my way now, and I hope you are not very tired.'

I gave her another penny when she was leaving, which she took with a nod of thanks. But before she went she stood before me in her full height, and said in slow, distinct tones, 'Mark my words, I am coming back this way in a month's time, and when I do I'll be the death of that ugly villain. I'll soon show him what it is to insult a respectable woman.'

'God bless you,' I said, having another laughing fit; 'God bless you, and if you ever go there again, play hell with him.'

Giving me a long, knowing wink, she began her journey, dancing as she went.

I felt so happy after hearing this woman's strong language that I sat on the bankside without a move, to let my happiness soak in. It was not so much the language that pleased me as the idea that I was free to hear it. For instance, several people had passed and stared at us, but there was not one could say, 'That man's name is Davies.' I could now taste real freedom.

Now I cannot say whether I was unconscious of my surroundings through deep thought, or was half asleep; all I know is that I was suddenly startled by hearing a voice say solemnly:

'Tis the voice of the sluggard, I hear him complain;
You have woke me too early, I must slumber again.

Looking up I saw a stout, bearded man of about fifty years of age, who stood leaning on a rough staff, regarding me with merry eyes. I could see at once that he was a real beggar, and I understood immediately that he was under the impression that he had said something funny and so I looked at him and laughed. My appreciation seemed to please him very much, for he stepped back pointed his staff at me and said again, with the same solemnity:

'Tis the voice of the sluggard, I hear him complain;
You have woke me too early, I must slumber again.

When I heard this for the second time, I lay helplessly in the grass, laughing; and the stranger laughed so heartily himself that he had to use his staff to keep from falling.

'Which way are you going?' I asked after we had both become a little more serious.

'To Reading,' he answered.

'I'm going there too,' said I, 'and if you are ready we will start at once.'

He agreed to this, and we began to walk leisurely along, talking about Wiltshire and other counties that we knew.

As we went along the stranger used his quotation a good many times, although my appreciation was not so hearty as it had been at first. However, he seemed to say it more for his own pleasure than for mine. The words appeared to haunt him and he could not get them out of his mind. I remember seeing one house that looked a likely one for a beggar's success, and drew my companion's attention to it, saying, 'I won't call at any more houses to-day, as I have enough money to see me all right until morning.' I said this because I felt certain that the stranger thought I was a beggar like himself. Hearing this, my companion stood and solemnly reproved me with his favourite words about the Sluggard. But in this instance he did not laugh after saying it, but went to the house himself.

Like all beggars worthy of a name, this man looked on himself as an honest worker. For instance, after he had begged a house and was back in my company, he would say in all

seriousness, 'We must work for a living sometimes,' or, 'I earned something at that house. A beggar has to work hard sometimes for what he gets.' In fact, all beggars get at last to think they are earning an honest livelihood, and it is only when they catch sight of the police that they suddenly see themselves in their own true character. So that I was not at all surprised to hear him say, after seeing me pass several houses by without calling at them, 'Why don't you go to them? you can't live without work.'

In the light of these sayings of his I became highly amused at his continual reference to the Sluggard. For what he really meant by it was this: that he had much admiration for the sluggard and was very sorry that he could not be one, seeing that he had to be begging often, or, in his own words, 'earning a living.'

My companion was filled with disgust to think we were going to Reading.

'They are making some new tram lines, and the lodging-houses are full of navvies,' he explained.

I was not at all surprised to see this disgust, for I knew that beggars and navvies could never agree. And in this instance, where the navvies would be in the majority, it would be almost unbearable. Beggars despise a navvy because he

works so very hard for a living; and navvies envy a beggar that he can live without work. My companion hated navvies, and went on to explain how it was all the worse for them that they did not try to be friendly with beggars.

'For,' said my companion, 'the navvy may get out of work, but as long as a beggar has a tongue in his head he's never out of work. The consequence is that beggars are always independent of navvies, but navvies are often glad to be assisted by beggars.'

Of course I knew these things well, but thought it best to give him the pleasure of appearing to instruct me.

Talking on this subject we reached Reading, and my companion, knowing the town well, led the way towards Silver Street, where the common lodging-houses are. However, before we got there, we saw a ragged man leaning against a lamp-post, apparently lost in thought. Giving me a nudge, my companion crept behind the stranger, put his mouth to his ear and began solemnly:

'Tis the voice of the sluggard . . .

But he was not allowed to finish, for the stranger turned at once and cried, 'Hullo! Slug, is that you?'

'Yes,' answered my companion, 'but I don't want to delay your business, for we *must* work sometimes. I will see you later in the lodging-house.'

'Come,' I said, joining in the conversation, —'Come, for I have the price of a drink or two of beer.'

Saying this, I led the way into a public-house, which happened to be just there. When we entered the public-house I saw my companion nod at several men and make himself quite at home. My attention was drawn to one man in particular. I could see that this man was not a travelling beggar, because he had the dirt of work upon him, his hands and face being black with coal dust. Seeing this, I came to the conclusion that he was doing odd jobs about the town.

'I suppose you all know that I have been to Oxford,' said this man. 'Yes, I have been to Oxford and have not long left there.'

No one seemed to take any notice of this man, but he still every now and then said, 'Yes, I want you all to know that I have been to Oxford, and if there is any other man present who has been there I'd like to have a few words with him.'

At last he said, speaking to me, 'Were you at Oxford?'

'I only passed through the town,' I answered, 'and was not educated there, if that's what you mean.'

'Ah!' said the stranger, with a little laugh, —'Ah! I was long enough at Oxford to learn something.'

'What does the poor fellow mean?' thought I. 'If he was educated at Oxford, why does he mention it now when he has fallen so low and in such company as this?'

'You only passed through Oxford,' he said, speaking to me again.

'That was all,' I answered.

'Well, you didn't learn much in that time,' he said, with a slight sneer.

'This man was never a gentleman,' thought I, 'or he would never sneer at a man that was not educated at Oxford.'

'There's a lot to learn,' I said quietly, 'without going to Oxford or Cambridge either.'

'A lot to learn without going to Oxford, is there?' he cried with another sneer. 'Don't you believe it; if you had had three months' hard labour at Oxford the same as I had you'd learn something, let me tell you that.'

Reading being so large a town, it did not take me long to find lodgings. The first coffee house I went into and applied for a bed was

glad enough to take my money. The landlady and her daughter — I could see no sign of a man — approved of my appearance at once and judged me to be quite clean and harmless.

The next morning I left Reading, starting for Twyford, on my way to Maidenhead. I had decided to make the last-named town the end of my travels, but did not know whether I would stay there over-night or not.

Just before I left Reading and reached the open country, I passed one of the most wretched street singers I had ever heard. He was singing one of those sentimental songs that are so successful in their appeal to women, especially mothers. It was a song that advised the boy to cherish his mother well, with a chorus that brought the singer a penny almost every time he came to it. As far as I can remember the words of the chorus were something like this:

> Oh, cherish her with care, my boy,
> Let not a mother's instincts smother;
> Though roses blow and violets glow,
> It's natural to love your mother.

The man that sang this was a sniveller of the first water, and I judged him at once to be naturally a very melancholy man, without the

least sense of humour. It was not long before I had a good chance of knowing this, for I had not gone very far when he overtook me.

'How far are you going?' I asked.

'I'll do a little business at Twyford,' he answered, 'and then make for Maidenhead, where I intend to stay the night.'

'Did you have good luck at Reading?' I asked.

'No,' he answered with bitterness. 'No, fourpence was all. One woman stood and after listening to me said, "Isn't it natural for all things to love a mother?"

'"Yes, kind lady," I answered, thinking to get twopence at least,—"Yes, kind lady, a tin mother is better than a silver father." But damn me if the cat didn't go off without giving me as much as a farthing. I can't sing pennies out of people's pockets now, the same as I used to. It is not because I am less deserving of pity, but because the world is getting harder. When I first began to sing in the streets I could make more than I do now, without taking the trouble to knock my knees together and making my voice tremble and sound weak like a sick man's.

Hearing this, I came to the conclusion that the street singer was under the impression that I was something of a beggar myself and that

accounted for his frankness and confidential tone.

So I said, in answer to his complaint, 'Perhaps you overdo the business.'

'No, it's not that,' he answered. 'The fact of the matter is this. The country is going to the dogs. I may as well be singing at the North Pole, where there nothing but heavy crops of snow, as in this country now. Just before I left Reading I saw a bootblack, and what d'you think he was doing?'

'What?' I asked, without having the least notion of what answer to expect.

'Well,' said the street singer bitterly, – 'well, he was cleaning his own boots. That's what the world has come to now, a poor bootblack cleaning his own boots. This is a hard life, and for all my suffering I deserve to be made an alderman before I die. If any man thinks I couldn't eat enough to be made an alderman, let him try me, that's all.'

On hearing this, I suggested that he would perhaps do better in a large city like London.

'No,' he answered, shaking his head despondently. 'No, I have tried London and I know what it is like. The last time I chanted in London two little sparrows were so pleased that they perched on a lamp-post and chirruped for

joy. Just then along comes a fine lady, and, taking a piece of cake out of her bag, broke it up and threw them the crumbs. But what did she give me? A smile for making the sparrows sing—the cat.'

'That was hard luck indeed,' I said.

'Of course,' he continued with a little more cheerfulness,—'Of course, I meet a kind lady occasionally, I must admit. For one day when I was singing in London a woman gave me a penny, and what do you think was on it?'

'I don't know,' I answered, knowing that, although a penny would have a head on one side and a tail on the other, yet there must have been something else. But what that something was I had not the least notion.

'There was a tear on it,' the street singer said in a faltering voice. 'Yes, as true as I stand here with you at my side, there was a tear on it. She was one of the kindest women that ever broke bread or breathed the breath of life. By God, she was! But there are not many like her. Sometimes I have to force people to give, or I'd starve. I have to take a stand in front of a house and keep on singing until the people are so annoyed that they give me a penny to go away.'

With this interesting conversation still going on we reached Twyford. But we had not gone far through the village when my companion, who had been looking at the houses for some time, came to a halt and said, 'I think I'll do a bit here.'

'How much money have you got, Ginger?' I asked.

The word Ginger slipped out of me unawares, but I was not sorry, for he answered to the name at once. No doubt every beggar would call him by that name, seeing he was decidedly that colour.

'Fourpence,' he answered, after a suspicious pause, for he did not know what I was about to propose.

'Well,' I said, seeing that I am not so hard up, I'll give you sixpence as soon as we reach Maidenhead. If you are satisfied with that arrangement, come along.'

'You are one of the kindest men that ever broke bread or breathed the breath of life,' cried Ginger. 'I don't suppose that I could make twopence in this village, for I have tried it several times before.'

In the course of conversation I learned that Ginger was going to put up at a common lodging-house at the other end of the town,

where every man would have a small cubicle to himself.

'That's where I'm going to stay too,' I said, 'and I'll not only pay for our two beds, but I'll also give you enough for supper for the two of us, providing you go out and buy the stuff and cook it.'

When Ginger heard this he stood and looked at me in amazement. However, he did not say anything for a time, although no doubt he was wondering who and what I was. But at last he said, with a soft laugh, 'We are now two independent gentlemen and can do without work for the rest of the day.'

We reached Maidenhead about six o'clock in the evening, having had several glasses of ale on the way, but not enough to make us feel any ill effects.

As soon as we reached that town we went straight to the lodging-house, where I at once paid for our two beds. After doing this at the office we entered the lodgers' kitchen, where between fifteen and twenty men had already gathered, and several women too. Giving Ginger a shilling, I told him to go out and buy something for supper. In a few moments he had returned with two rashers of bacon, two eggs, one pennyworth of bread, a halfpennyworth of tea,

the same amount of sugar, and a halfpenny-worth of milk, with fourpence-halfpenny change. This was not only a very good meal for two at sevenpence-halfpenny, but there was also enough tea and sugar left for breakfast.

I had been at this house before on several occasions when I was a real tramp. At the present time I was clean, and my only fear was that I would get lousy. However, seeing that I was to end my travels on the following morning by taking train home to London, I did not worry much about that, as I would soon be able to clean myself thoroughly.

As I have said, there were quite a number of lodgers present, and some of them were drunk and quarrelsome, one man in particular. This man, who had a terrible cough, was suspicious and irritable, and disagreed with everything that was said. For instance, there was a big navvy standing up with his back to the fire and talking in a quiet sensible manner. 'All I want,' said this navvy, standing with his hands deep in his trouser pockets, and speaking to no one in particular — 'all I want is work, and failing that, free soup, but as long as there is a House of Lords I shall get neither. Let them think of the starving white people at home and never mind red or brown blankets for the blacks.'

Saying this, the navvy looked round the room, and of course his eye lighted for a second on the irritable lodger. The navvy had no sooner finished his last sentence than the irritable lodger sprang to his feet in a violent passion: 'What did you look at me for?' he shouted. 'Can I help it? Did I make the House of Lords? Do I look as if I belonged to the House of Lords?'

However, he was now seized with such a fit of coughing that he could say no more.

This little quarrel no sooner came to an end than another lodger, who had also been drinking too much, came in and, going straight to a pot on the fire, looked into it and then cried, 'Who has taken half a potato out of my pot? I put three in and now there are only two and a half.'

'It has boiled away, most likely,' suggested the navvy quietly.

'Then how is it the other two didn't boil away?' cried the other.

Saying this, he stepped forward to the better light and, carrying the pot in his hand and looking into it again, cried in a furious voice, 'Where's the meat? Where's the piece of mutton? Do you know who took it, any of you?'

'What are you looking at me for?' snapped the irritable lodger. 'Can I see into the pot from here? Do you think I have an eye like an eel to see through the mud?'

'If I only knew who took that meat,' shouted the other, 'I'd split his nose like a sheep's trotter.'

'You flaming liar,' cried the irritable lodger, bursting into an ungovernable fit of passion. 'You flaming liar, you had no mutton at all in the pot. It was charity soup, with no other meat than flies, and they got in by accident. You don't hear *me* bragging of what I have to eat. Some of you fellows strut about, pretending you have had chicken or turkey when you haven't had as much as a Chinese sandwich — a fly between two tea-leaves. Look here,' he continued, taking a piece of meat off his own plate, – 'Look here, you lousy, pudding-faced scoundrel, I can afford to give meat to the cat.' With these words he held a piece of meat dangling from his fingers, and cried in a still louder voice, 'Puss, puss.'

'The cat's gone into the backyard,' said another lodger; 'she was carrying the kitten in her mouth.'

'Of course she was carrying it in her mouth,' cried the irritable lodger with a sneer; 'where

the devil did you expect her to carry it – in her arms? Don't we all know that a cat's arms are her legs as well, and how could she walk if – '

The irritable lodged had now worked himself into such a passion that he could say no more and fell into another violent fit of coughing.

'When you talk to me of starving,' said the lodger who had had his mutton stolen, 'I guess you don't know what you are talking about. I have been used to plenty of stuff. Yes, I belong to God's country – the United States of America.'

'Haven't I been to America, you rotter?' cried the irritable lodger who had now recovered his breath. 'If America is God's country, all I can say is this – "He's welcome to it!" What! I not know America? Didn't I go there years ago and build a hut in the wilds? and didn't two big black birds stand on a bough, and seeing me there all alone cry, "Ha! Ha!" and flap their wings and fly away? And didn't they come back again an hour after, bringing four others with them? And didn't all the six of them stand on a bough looking at me? And didn't they all cry, "Ha! Ha!" and flap their wings and fly away? And when the hut was built, didn't these six black devils

come again, bringing twelve others with them to look at me? And didn't the whole lot of them stand on the boughs and cry, "Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!" and flap their wings and fly away? And weren't they all laughing at me for leaving England and going into the wilds of America to live all alone in a little hut? Don't talk to *me* of America – you Fourth of July cracker.'

After this long speech the irritable lodger fell into another violent fit of coughing, which became so bad that he was bent double and we expected to see him at any moment fall under the table. However, he recovered after a time, and then probably being very much weakened, he rested his poor head on his arms at the side of his plate, and lay there motionless. He lay so long in this position that no doubt he was fast asleep.

The next morning I was up early, and not seeing Ginger, who was either in bed or had gone, I had my breakfast on my way to the railway station and then took train for London. This ended my travels.

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